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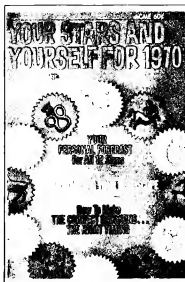
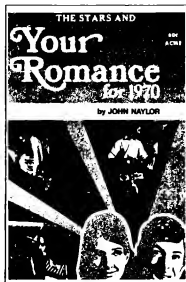
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Volume 3

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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The Editor's Page

February 1st, 1933 fell on a Monday, so I made a bee-line for the local newsstand in Darien, Conn., in hopes that a new issue of *STRANGE TALES* would be there waiting for me. It wasn't, of course; I didn't know that the January 1933 issue, which had come out the previous November was the final one. But I did see a new magazine there: *GREAT DETECTIVE*. The cover was all black, and there was a little design of a Fu-Manchu type of head on it, and either titles of stories or author's names or both—I no longer recall which. I know now, of course, that this was an all-reprint magazine, a forerunner of *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE* (although the latter, of course, has been mingling resurrections with new stories for many years and may have done so from the first). But even had I known that all the contents were reprint, it would not have made a particle of difference to me: I hadn't read these stories.

The magazine lasted for nine issues then disappeared; I rather regret now that I didn't save my copies. However, it was here, somewhere around the latter numbers that I came upon *The Tuesday Night Club Murders*, by Agatha Christie, a series of short stories featuring Miss Jane Marple; three or four of the series appeared before *GREAT DETECTIVE* vanished.

This series, originally starting in 1928, running through 1933, was the beginning of the Miss Marple stories; she appeared

in a full-length novel, *Murder at the Vicarage* in 1930. The author says about her, "I think that she is best in the solving of short problems; these thirteen problems" (the first thirteen tales were collected, and published in England in 1932 as *The Thirteen Problems*; as with many of Mrs. Christie's books, the American and English titles differ, and sometimes widely) "I consider the real essence of Miss Marple for those who like her."

The author also says, "Miss Marple has some faint affinity with my own grandmother, also a pink and white old lady who, although having led the most sheltered and Victorian of lives, nevertheless always appeared to be intimately acquainted with the depths of human depravity. One could be made to feel incredibly naive and credulous by her reproachful remark: 'But did you believe what they said to you? I never do!'"

We see her first in *The Tuesday Night Club*, which starts out with her nephew, Raymond West (author) saying "Unsolved mysteries". "Miss Marple wore a black brocade dress, very much pinched in around the waist. Mechlin lace was arranged in a cascade down in front of the bodice. She had on black lace mittens, and a black lace cap surmounted the piled-up masses of her snowy hair. She was knitting—something white and soft and fleecy. Her faded blue eyes, benignant and kindly,

surveyed her nephew and her nephew's guests with gentle pleasure."

We find that she considers her nephew's books very clever but wonders if he really thinks that people are so unpleasant as he makes them out to be. She, herself, has found that "...so many people seem to me not to be either bad or good, but simply, you know, very silly."

The discussion winds up with a suggestion that they form a club, and this evening being Tuesday, they'll call it the Tuesday Night Club. At each meeting a different member is to propound a problem—some mystery of which the member has personal knowledge and, of course, to which he knows the answer, and see whether anyone else can come to the correct conclusion. The members of the club, in addition to Miss Marple and her nephew, include an artist, a man of the world, an elderly clergyman, and a solicitor. The man of the world is Sir Henry Clithering, a retired Commissioner of Scotland Yard. At first count, Miss Marple is overlooked, as Joyce Lempriere, the artist, notes that there are only five of them and there ought to be six. Miss Marple, would indeed, enjoy taking part: "I think it would be very interesting, especially with so many clever gentlemen present. I am afraid I am not clever myself, but living all these years in St. Mary Mead does give one an insight into human nature."

The others regard this somewhat indulgently—after all, how can one learn anything about people and the world from the confines of a small village and perhaps what one reads in the papers and hears on the radio (1928, remember?). But the joke, of course, is on the others and on the reader, too, in a sense, for this is the whole burden of Mrs. Christie's thesis lying behind the Jane Marple stories. Spend a lifetime in a small village, and observe people carefully, and

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you will know the essence of human behavior and motivations the world over. Details and scales of expression differ, and this is what confuses most people (who are not particularly observant), especially if they are bemused by highly sophisticated theories about human motivation and behavior. To a very large extent, we see around us what we expect to see—and no more.

Jane Marple has no complicated and scientific-sounding theories, just the experience of observation which day after day has confirmed the fundamental truth of the Victorian outlook. The result is that she is never surprised or astonished by evil, nor again does she over-react to it. In *Murder at the Vicarage*, the Vicar reproves her gently: "Don't you think, Miss Marple, that we're all inclined to let our tongues run away with us too much? Charity thinketh no evil, you know. Inestimable harm may be done by the foolish wagging of tongues in ill-natured gossip."

"'Dear Vicar,' said Miss Marple, 'you are so unworldly. I'm afraid that, observing human nature for as long as I have done, one gets not to expect very much from it. I daresay idle tittle-tattle is very wrong and unkind, but it is so often true, isn't it?' "

And the facts of life are that it is.

G. C. Ramsey's chapter on Miss Marple in *Agatha Christie, Mistress of Mystery* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1967; \$4.00) is very fine, although much too short by half; he does, however, present the essence of the lady and her methods. As with Hercule Poirot, the author has had to slow time down so that she has not aged more than twenty years since 1928, as her most recent appearance was in 1965, *At Bertram's Hotel*. Perhaps we should make it less than twenty years, so that we can consider her a spry 80 now. And like Hercule Poirot, she encourages people to

talk and listens carefully, and uses her little gray cells...

...But in a quite different way. It isn't a matter of intuition so much as a way of reasoning by analogy which seems impossibly unscientific on the surface. Underneath, it is more genuinely scientific than most sociological theories which lead so many people astray, although perhaps the most deceptive illusion is that people with status are different from people without it. They aren't, underneath, at all; and that is what Miss Marple's eyes are firmly fixed on. Rich or poor, black, brown, yellow, red, or white, English-speaking or some other language, people do fall into recognizable types—recognizable without the need for learned psychological or pathological terms; and while each and every member of a given group does not do the exact same thing all the time, in the same way, there are certain situations wherein any given member of a group is likely to respond in a similar (not identical) way.

Jane Marple not only hits upon the solution to the first mystery presented; she is the only one even to catch a part of the truth. Raymond West expresses wonder: How did she do it? He would never have thought of the little maid in the kitchen being connected with the case.

"'No, dear,' said Miss Marple, 'but you don't know as much of life as I do. A man of that Jones' type—coarse and jovial. As soon as I heard there was a pretty young girl in the house I felt sure that he would not have left her alone.' " She has already related a parallel case, the surface details of which are so different that no one else in the room can see what possible connection there might be.

Every member of the "Jones' type" does not, of course, have the occasion to murder his wife, or is tired of her, or has

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a pretty and pregnant mistress on the side. But when certain combinations of circumstance arise, we can depend upon the "Jones' type" to meet the situation in a way which society doesn't entirely approve. It doesn't always come to murder, nor again are all parties to such cases quite as careless. Some mistresses manage to avoid pregnancy, and some murders are not discovered, and some wives or mistresses manage to hold a "Jones" once they've got him.

There are ten Miss Marple novels, all but one—*Murder With Mirrors*—presently in print (this is December 3, 1969); and since Pocket Books own rights to the American edition, you might find a new printing available by the time you read this. Another collection, *13 Clues for Miss Marple*, is available; it contains cases not in *The Tuesday Club Murders*, but also repeats some of them; and if you have the other collections of short stories, *The Regatta Mystery*, *The Mousetrap*, *The Witness for the Prosecution*, *Double Sin*, and *The Underdog*, you won't need *13 Clues for Miss Marple* at all. One place where the Ramsey book is especially helpful is in its breakdown of the contents of all the published short story collections, both British and American, so that you can see how the duplications work out. Unless you confine yourself to collections that are 100% Poirot, Marple or one of Mrs. Christie's other characters, you will not be able to avoid some overlap; but at least you can be saved from buying a promising-looking title which turns out to be 100% duplication.

The reader is not always likely to get a fair break in the Jane Marple short stories, since the essential clues—the analogies—are in Miss Marple's memory, and we cannot know what she is relating to what until she tells us. If you've read enough of Agatha Christie's other

stories, however, you always have a chance of detecting the author making a variation—or sometimes brazenly repeating—a device she has used before. (In this respect, Ramsey offers a wonderful red herring on page 32, when he suggests that Mrs. Christie ought to “do Roger Ackroyd” again.)

In the novels, however, I would say that the reader has a sporting chance in nine of the ten, and may have in the tenth as well. I have to make this reservation because I haven't been able to find a copy of *Murder With Mirrors* for re-reading.

While Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple are the best known characters who appear in more than two Christie stories, her lesser-known series-principals are not to be slighted.

Prudence Cowley and Tommy Beresford, known as Tuppence and Tommy, were introduced in *The Secret Adversary*, 1922. These are decidedly “fun” characters, but the mystery and intrigue and danger are solid enough. If you're really alert, you'll catch the identity of the mastermind ahead of our somewhat zany adventurers. (I rather wish, however, that Mr. Ramsey had not revealed which story it was wherein the author repeats.) Having survived this encounter and found each other for life, they set up a detective agency, and *Partners in Crime* relates 23 of their cases—many of them hilarious, for here Mrs. Christie is carefully burlesquing other detectives and detective story authors; nor does she spare herself and Hercule Poirot in case No. 23, *The Man Who Was No. 16*. This collection was published in 1929; in 1941, a novel, *N or M* relates how Tuppence and Tommy, essentially unchanged, go back into business to catch German agents in England and, as Ramsey puts it, “...prove to their children that the older generation still know a thing or

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two." Unlisted in the Ramsey book, because it appeared a year later—1968, is *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*; here we find Tuppence realistically older, and still in love with Tommy and a mystery. This time her 'satiabie curiosity almost finishes her and at the end she says she's ready to go home and stay there. She's much more the activist detective than Poirot, and she and Tommy are a prototype of the light-hearted husband-wife sleuth teams that became popular in the '30s and thereafter—such as the Nick and Nora Charles team in the movies, portrayed so delightfully by William Powell and Myrna Loy. (I misremember, however, whether Nora really plays much of a part in the sleuthing; having been in love with Nora at the time sort of interfered with my noticing some important details.)

Mr. Parker Pyne appears only in short stories, and I think the author was wise to confine him to them. These are clever tales, with interesting mysteries—not only crimes, I might add. The gimmick is an advertisement which appears in the (London) *TIMES'* famous agony column: "Are You Happy? If not, consult Mr. Parker Pyne, 17 Richmond Street." A dozen cases appear in *Mr. Parker Pyne, Detective* (the stories were published originally in 1932, 1933 and 1941) and he also appears in the title story of the collection, *The Regatta Mystery*, as well as in *Problem at Pollensa Bay*, in that collection. (The rest of the tales are Poirot or Miss Marple, plus one independent tale—a real chiller—entitled *In A Glass Darkly*.)

Harley Quin is the strangest of Mrs. Christie's series characters. He is seen only when Mr. Satterthwaite is around, and Mr. Satterthwaite seems to have the knack of walking into mysteries. Does *The Mysterious Mr. Quin* really exist at all? (A dozen stories about him appear in

the collection with the title above, and a thirteenth is in the collection entitled *The Mousetrap*.) We shall have to allow that he does, because so many other persons besides Mr. Satterthwaite see him and converse with him; nonetheless there is something unreal about him. He simply appears and then goes away after the mystery is solved, and the only reason for his appearance seems to be the existence of the mystery—murder, of course. He does not appear like a ghost or a magician, nothing spooky, but we never really find out what he is doing there other than taking part. He does not exactly solve the problems, but rather has a catalytic effect upon Mr. Satterthwaite who, under Quin's influence, sees things that are there right under his eyes (and usually the reader's eyes) in a different light than they appeared at first; then, putting them together, he knows the truth of the matter. There is a philosophical tone in these tales, which, for me, overcomes the unsatisfactory aspects of Mr. Quin; and all are good mysteries. I wonder if the author was trying to do her own variation on Father Brown, here; there are certain similarities; and actually, the flaws tend to divert attention from these resemblances. (Mrs. Christie would not be the world-wide success she is as a mystery writer had she not mastered the art of diverting the reader's attention from that which she does not want examined too closely at the moment.)

While I do not wish to exhaust you, the reader, it's more that I do not want to exhaust myself that lies behind my decision to bypass the non-series short stories on the whole. Two of them made excellent films: *Philomel Cottage* (which became *Love From a Stranger*, superbly performed by Basil Rathbone and Ann Harding) and *The Witness for the Prosecution*, to which I referred in the

(turn to page 126)

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THE SMELL

by Francis Flagg

(author of *By Hands of the Dead*)

THE FAMOUS PHYSICIAN, a noted member of the Society for Psychical Research, pulled thoughtfully at his pipe, that night in 1931. "During all the years of my investigation of strange phenomena, have I ever run across anything that defied what we please to call natural explanation? Well, that is hard to say; I don't know. Only years ago—" he paused and lit a match. "Perhaps I had better tell you about it.

"At the time I was a young doctor practicing medicine in a small town in Nova Scotia. That was before I became a member of the Society, but not before I had become interested in spiritualism and kindred subjects. At college I had studied under Munstenburg, and witnessed some of his unique experiments in relation to hypnotism. Munstenburg also conducted some other

"My whole body seemed to gulp in the foul atmosphere . . . and from head to foot I was conscious of rapture and delight that beggars description . . .

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peculiar inquiries into what is called occult or secret wisdom, but this latter fact is known to but few. It was under him I matriculated in psychology—and in some other things which colleges neither recognize nor give degrees for.

“Naturally I acquired an assortment of bizarre facts and experiences, and a large library composed of other than dry treatises on medicine. It was my good fortune to possess a small income independent of my practice, and this enabled me to devote more time to reading and study than to patients. I had an office in what was called the Herald Building, and rooms at the ‘Brunswick,’ a rooming and boarding house of the old-fashioned type. I not only lodged at the ‘Brunswick,’ I took most of my meals there.

"One evening I was sitting in my room after dinner, enjoying my pipe and a book of Hudson's, *A Hind in Hyde Park*, when a hasty knock sounded at the door. 'Come in,' I called perfunctorily, and there entered a young man of slender build, pale face and indeterminate features, with dark hair and eyes. He was a recent boarder at the 'Brunswick,' Lemuel Mason by name, and only a few days before the landlady had introduced me to him at the breakfast table. I gleaned the fact that he was (though he did not look it) of fisher stock down Lunenburg way. He was a graduate of a normal school, and expected, within the month after summer vacation, to take a position as teacher in a local private academy. A quiet young man, he appeared, in the middle twenties, commonplace enough. Only with the observant eyes of a physician I had noticed at the dinner table that he looked quite ill; his pale face was unusually haggard, even distraught. His first words were startling enough.

" 'Doctor, tell me, am I going mad?'

" 'Probably not,' I answered with what I hoped was a reassuring smile. 'Otherwise you would scarcely ask the question. But tell me, what is disturbing you?'

" 'Almost incoherently he talked, and I studied him attentively as he did so. Afterwards I gave him a thorough examination.

" 'No,' I said, 'you are not mad; you are perfectly normal in every way. All your reflexes and reactions, both physical and mental, are what they should be. There is a little nervous tension, of course, some natural excitement from the strangeness of the experiences you say you have undergone, an experience, I again assure you, that will prove to have a simple and scientific explanation.'

" 'I said all this, being certain of nothing, but only desirous of calming my patient at the moment. I realized that it would take a longer period of observation to determine his mental condition.

" 'Tell me, what is your room like?' He had already informed me that he lodged in another house about two blocks away.

" 'It is a small room, Doctor; about as large as your ante-room out there.'

" 'And how is it furnished?'

“ ‘With a single iron bed, a bureau, desk and two chairs.’

“ ‘Tell me again of your experience, slowly.’

“ ‘I took the room because it was cheap; and because of its reputation I got it for a nominal sum.’

“ ‘Reputation? What do you mean?’

“ ‘I don’t know exactly. Some girl died there, I believe. But I have never been a nervous individual; I don’t believe in ghosts or such nonsense. So I leapt at the opportunity to be economical.’

“ ‘And what did you see?’

“ ‘Nothing. That’s the curious part of it.’ He laughed huskily. ‘But I’ve smelt—’

“ ‘Is there any opening from your room that gives on another chamber?’

“ ‘No. Only the door and the transom above it, opening on the hall.’

“ ‘Does anyone else mention smelling anything?’

“ ‘Not that I know of.’

“ ‘And the window?’

“ ‘Opens on the rear garden. There is a plum tree outside the window, and a bed of flowers, pansies and rose bushes.’

“ ‘Are you sure you do not smell them? On a warm sultry evening the perfume can sometimes be quite overpowering.’

“ ‘No, Doctor, it was nothing at all like that. Let me describe again what happened. I moved into the room yesterday afternoon. At nine o’clock I went to bed. My window was open, of course, and the transom over the door ajar. For perhaps an hour I read—maybe longer. Even while reading I was conscious of sniffing some subtle perfume, and once or twice I got up and went into the hall, but, when I did, the smell vanished. However, it was only the suggestion of a smell; so finally I turned out the light and went to sleep.

“ ‘What time it was the smell awakened me, I do not know, but the room was full of it. It was not a fragrant smell—not the odor of damp earth and breathing flowers—but rather, of something unpleasant; something, I am sure, that was rotten. Not that I thought so at the time, for during the experience I was intoxicated by the odor. That is the ghastly part of the whole

business. I tell you I lay on the bed and luxuriated in that smell. I actually rolled in it, rolling on the mattress, over and over, as you may have seen dogs rolling in carrion. My whole body seemed to gulp in the foul atmosphere, every inch and pore of it; my skin muscles twitched, and from head to foot I was conscious of such exquisite rapture and delight that it beggars description.

" 'All night I lay on the bed and wallowed in that delicious sea of perfume; and then suddenly it was daylight and I could hear people stirring in other rooms. The smell was gone, and I was conscious of being sick and weak; so sick that I retched and vomited and could eat no breakfast. And it was then I realized that all night I had revelled in the odor of rotteness, of something unspeakably foul, but at the time desirable and piercingly sweet. So I came to you.'

"He leaned back, exhausted, and for a moment I was at a loss what to say. But only for a moment. You will remember that I was reading Hudson's book, *A Hind in Hyde Park*, when interrupted. If you have ever read the book, you will recollect that a portion of it deals with the sense of smell in animals. By a strange coincidence—if anything can be termed merely a coincidence—I was reading that section, and also several passages devoted to a dissertation on dreams. Taking refuge in an explanation quoted by Hudson, I said soothingly:

" 'The condition is evidently a rare but quite explainable one. I suppose you know something of the nature of dreams. A sleeping man pricks his hand with a pin and a dream follows to account for the prick. He dreams that he is rambling in a forest on a hot summer's day and throws himself down in the shade to rest; and while resting and perhaps dozing, he is startled by a slight rustling sound, and looking around is terrified to observe a venomous snake gliding towards him with uplifted head. The serpent strikes and pierces his hand, and the pain of the bite awakes the man. You see that the serpent's bite is the culmination in a dramatic scene which had taken some time in the acting; yet the whole dream, with its feeling, thoughts, acts, began and ended with the pin prick.'

“‘But what has that to do with my case?’ he asked.

“‘Everything,’ I replied, with more confidence than I felt. ‘In your case the pin prick is an odor. Some strange perfume strikes a sensitive portion of your nostril and instantly you are thrown into a dream, a nightmarish condition, to account for the smell. Since the case of the dream is an odor and not a pin prick, the time of the dream was a longer duration, that is all.’

“A little color came back into his face. ‘It seemed to me that I was wide awake through it all,’ he said slowly, ‘but that was doubtless an illusion. Doctor, you relieve my mind of a great fear. You are sure—’

“‘Certain,’ I said briskly, feeling certain of nothing but the psychological effect of my words in calming his mind. ‘The weather is somewhat cool now, and you had better sleep with your window and transom closed tonight, to shut out the disturbing odor. I shall give you a prescription for a sedative to insure sound sleep. Don’t worry yourself any further about it.’

“A queer case, I thought, as he went away, but how queer I did not realize until. . . .”

The doctor paused and relit his pipe. “If I had only known then what I know now! But I was young and inexperienced. It is true that I possessed the book. But much of it was a sealed mystery to me. Besides, it seemed absurd to connect . . . Despite the witnessing of many queer experiments, the deep study I had already made of strange manuscripts on ancient wisdom, I did not as yet realize the terrible reality that lies behind many occult symbols and allegories. Therefore I had almost persuaded myself that Lemuel Mason’s experience had indeed been the result of a nightmare, when I was startled to have him break into my rooms the next morning with a ghastly face and almost hysterical manner. I forced him to swallow a stiff whiskey. ‘What is the matter?’ I asked him.

“‘My God, Doctor, the smell!’

“‘What?’

“‘It came again.’

“‘Go on.’

"In all its foulness and rottenness. But this time I not only smelled it, I *heard* it, and *felt*—"

"Steady, man, steady!"

"Give me another drink. Oh, my God! It whispered and whispered. What did it whisper? I can't remember. Only things that drove me into an ecstasy of madness. Wait! There is one word. I remember it."

"With shaking lips he uttered a name that made me start. No, I will not say what that name was. It is not good for man to hear some things. Only I had already seen it in the book. I shook him roughly."

"And then, then. . . ."

"I felt it, I tell you, all night. Its body was long and sinuous, cold and clammy, the body of a serpent, and yet of a woman too. I held it in my arms and caressed it . . . Oh, it was lovely, lovely—and unspeakably vile!" He fell, shuddering, into a chair.

"And now," said the doctor, "I must tell of the criminal thing I did. Yes, though I sensed the danger in which the man stood, I persuaded him to spend another night in his room. I was young, remember, and it came over me that here was an opportunity to study a strange phenomenon at first hand. Besides, I believed that I could protect him from any actual harm. A little knowledge," said the doctor slowly, "is a dangerous thing. I did not then know that beyond a certain point of resistance there is no safety for man or beast, save in flight and that Lemuel Mason had passed that point."

"I was agog with excitement, eloquent in my determination to delve further into the matter. Lemuel Mason's one desire was to flee, to never again cross the threshold of the accursed room. 'It is haunted,' he cried, 'haunted!' God forgive me, I overcame his reluctance. 'You must face this thing; it would be madness to run away.' And I believe what I said. I fortified him with stimulants, prevailed on him to put his trust in me, and that evening we went to his room together; for I was to stay the night with him."

"The house that held the room was an old one, one of a street full of ancient dwellings. People of means, of fashion had

inhabited it thirty years before. But the fashionable quarter had shifted southward, the people had died or moved, and the once substantial mansion had fallen on evil days. The wide corridors were dark and gloomy, as only old corridors can be dark and gloomy; the painted walls faded and discolored, and as I followed Lemuel Mason up two flights of stairs, I was conscious of a musty odor, an odor of dust and decay.

"The room was, as he had described it, at the end of a long hall, in the rear, designed doubtless for the use of a servant; it was rather small and stuffy, with nothing distinctive about it except its abnormally high ceiling. Yet was it real, or only my imagination, that something brooded in the room? Imagination, I decided, and lit all three gas jets.

"It was nine o'clock. Mason collapsed on the bed. I had administered a powerful sedative. In a few minutes he was sleeping as peacefully as a child. Seated in one chair with my feet propped up on another, I smoked my pipe, and read, and watched. I was not jumpy, my nerves were steady enough. The book that I read was the strange one by that medieval author whose symbol is the Horns of Onam. Few scholars have ever seen a copy of it. My own was given me by—but that doesn't matter. I read it, I say, fascinated by the hidden things, the incredible, yes, even horrible things hinted at on every page, and by the strange drawings and weird designs.

"I heard other people mount the stairs and go to their various rooms. Only one other room was occupied on this floor, I noticed, and that was at the far end of the corridor. Soon everything became very still. I glanced at my watch, and saw that it was twelve-thirty. There was no noise at all, save the almost inaudible creakings and groanings which old houses give voice to at midnight, and the little sighing sounds the air made as it bubbled through the gas. These noises did not disturb me at all. I had watched in old houses before, and my mind automatically classified them for what they were.

"But suddenly there was something else, something that . . . I sniffed involuntarily; I surged to my feet. The room was full of a strange odor, an odor that was like a tangible, yet invisible,

presence, an insidious odor that sought to lull me, overcome my senses. But I was wide awake, forewarned of my danger. Three gas jets were burning to give me added confidence, and I fought off the influence of that smell with every effort of will.

"Almost I felt it recoil before the symbol I drew in the air with my finger; but even as the odor grew faint and remote, I saw Mason straighten on the bed with a convulsive sigh, roll over and sit up. I sat by him again. His eyes were shut, but his face—never have I seen a human face express such emotions of delirious rapture and delight. And it was written not only on his face. His whole body writhed and twisted and *squirmed* in an abandonment of ecstasy that was horrible to watch. With a cry, I leapt to his side.

" 'Mason!' I shouted, 'wake up! Wake up!'

"But he paid me no attention. His hands went out in sensuous gestures, as if they handled something; fondled it, caressed it. I shook him roughly. 'Mason! Mason!'

" 'Oh,' he crooned, smoothing the air, his body writhing under my touch, his lips forming amorous kisses and endearing words.

" 'For God's sake, man!'

"But the spell held him; it was beyond my frantic efforts to arouse him. The smell came in waves that rose and receded. Then, calling on every atom of occult lore upon which I depended, I drew around us the sacred pentagram. 'Begone!' I cried, uttering the incommunicable name, and that name which it is tempting madness for the human tongue to utter. 'By the power of Three in One, by the Alpha and Omega, by the might of The Eternal Monad—back!' I commanded.

"I felt it go from myself, but not from Mason. Still his body writhed and twisted with voluptuous ecstasy. His face radiated unhuman lust and joy, and his hands, his hands . . . With a feeling of unutterable horror I realized that he was beyond the protection of any magic I could invoke to save him.

" 'Oh,' he crooned, with that smoothing gesture. 'Oh, oh, oh.' He went on like that, mumbling occasionally, 'The feel of your

skin, the fragrance of it. Closer, beloved, closer. Whisper, whisper . . .

"And then in a thrilling undertone that made my scalp prickle on my head, he said, 'I have felt you, heard you. Let me see you, let me *see* you.'

"But he must not see! I knew that. I must drag him beyond the room before he could see. With both hands I seized his body. Only I seemed to be dragging not only his body but another that clung to it, resisted my efforts, disputed every inch of the way to the door. My senses reeled; once again the smell poured in on me like an invisible fog.

"Fear, blind, corroding fear had me in its grip. Like a man in a nightmare I struggled. Would I never reach the door? The invisible antagonist tugged, pulled. Three feet to go; two; one. With a last desperate effort I crashed against the door with the full weight of my body. Fortunately the door opened outwardly and the catch was weak. With a splintering of rotten woodwork, it gave under my lunge and I went staggering into the hall, still clinging to Mason. And even as I did so I heard him shriek terribly, once, twice, and then go limp in my hands.

"All over the house doors banged, voices shouted, and the lodger in the room at the farther end of the hall came rushing out in a nightgown that flapped at his bare shanks. 'For God's sake,' he cried, 'what's the matter here?'

"But I did not answer. For staring down on the face of Mason on which was frozen a look of such stark horror that it congealed the blood in my veins, I realized that I had dragged him from the accursed room a second too late.

"He had seen!"

The doctor stared at his listeners. "Yes, he was dead. Heart failure, they called it. 'That expression on his face,' said the landlady with a shudder; 'it is like the look on the face of the girl who died there two years ago.'

"'For God's sake, woman,' I cried, 'tear that room to pieces! Board it up, lock it away! Never let anyone sleep there again!'

"Later, I learned that in the great explosion of 1917, the house was destroyed by fire!

"And now," said the doctor, sucking at his cold pipe, "what about a natural explanation? Is the weird occurrence I have related open to one? In a sense, nothing can be unnatural, and yet . . . yet . . ." He tapped the bowl of his pipe on the ash-tray "For twenty years I have studied, pondered, dipped into the almost forgotten lore of ancient mysteries, of the truth behind the fable, and sometimes I think, I believe . . . that there are stranger things in heaven and earth . . ." He paused. "Long ago primitive man was an animal and his sense of smell must have been highly developed. Perhaps through it he cognized another world; a world of subtle sounds and sights; a world just as concrete and real as the one we know; an inimical world. The 'garden,' perhaps, *and the devil in the garden.*" He laughed strangely.

"Perhaps certain odors generated in that room; perhaps the invisible presence there of something alien, incredible, caused Mason (and in a lesser degree, myself) to exercise a faculty the human race, thank God, has long ago outgrown. Perhaps—"

But at sight of his listeners' faces the doctor came to an abrupt stop.

"Ah," he said; "but I see that this explanation is not *natural!*"



THE RECKONING

The first ballot put *The White Domino* in the lead, but from the second one on, contention was between the supporters of Edmond Hamilton and H.P. Lovecraft. Some dislike votes came in for HPL, but these were doubled by "outstanding" nominations. The only other story to receive a dislike vote also received an outstanding nomination to balance things—this was *The Feline Phantom*, Paul Ernst received outstanding nominations, but no dislike votes.

Here are the final results: (1) *The Outsider*, H. P. Lovecraft; (2) *The Dogs of Doctor Dwann*, Edmond Hamilton; (3) *The White Domino*, Urann Thayer; (4) *The Consuming Flame*, Paul Ernst; (5) *The Parasite*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; (6) *The Feline Phantom*, Gilbert Draper.

The Temple Of Death

(author of *Wolf Hollow Bubbles*)

by David H. Keller, M.D.

"ACCORDING TO YOUR STORY, MR. BRADLEY," said Seybold Eastwood of the *Empire Personal Agency*, "your brother, William Bradley, was a collector of rare jewelry. When he left his apartment in San Francisco he carried over a million dollars worth of diamonds. The next you heard from him was a letter from London which said he would be back in America within a few months. He did not return and, consequently, you are worried. I believe that he has been murdered. Of course, if

"...the lovers of the goddess find consolation in her embrace. Then, casting forth the delicacies of the banquet table, the spotted ones, bending backward, slowly journey to the place of their beginnings."

Taine of San Francisco was not, like Jules de Grandin, a character who appeared exclusively in the pages of a single magazine; he was first seen in **AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY** in 1928; later we found him in **SCIENCE WONDER STORIES**, **SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY**, **AMAZING DETECTIVE TALES** and **AMAZING STORIES**. Lt. (Ret.) Herman R. Jacks sent us a complete breakdown of titles and magazines, which we ran in *The Cauldron* in our Summer issue (No. 13). However, there were other Taine stories written, one of which (*Wolf Hollow Bubbles*) we published in our Winter 1968/69 issue (No. 11); here is a second tale in the series which did not appear in any of the regular magazines, and we wish to thank Mrs. Celia Keller for making it available to us.

you wish, our agency will investigate, but there is little information to help us. If the solution were easy you would not have consulted us. I have other appointments, so please excuse me."

"You do not seem interested. This man is my brother," James Bradley said.

"Interested, but not hopeful."

James Bradley angrily left the agency. He had come to London, convinced that the finest detectives in the world could be found there. All the way from his home in San Francisco he had hoped that the mystery of his brother's disappearance would be solved by the famous *Empire Personal Agency*. Instead of being helped, he had been casually dismissed. Obviously the agency thought it useless to hunt for a murdered man. But Bradley refused to believe that his brother was dead.

He decided to see Dr. Hartwig, a recognized authority on old manuscripts. Hartwig had been highly esteemed in Germany before the authorities discovered that he was non-Aryan. Now, in 1934, he was living in exile, trying to find peace in his old age. Bradley told his story to the little white-haired man who listened with sympathetic interest.

"A most unusual story, Mr. Bradley," was the old man's comment. "Your brother goes on a mysterious journey, taking with him his collection of precious jewelry. He promised to return in six months, but he failed to keep this promise. In his room he left an envelope containing a single sheet of old

manuscript. You think this may have something to do with his disappearance. You honor me by asking me to translate it. Why did you not see Perkins of Harvard, Smith of the Metropolitan Museum, or Southard in your Congressional Library?"

"I saw them all," Bradley explained, smiling. "Each gave me a translation, and each told me that he had been your pupil; that you had taught him all that he knew; and that you knew far more than he ever would. So I came to you. Here is the paper."

"They were all good boys," sighed the white-haired man. "I am happy to hear they remember me. Now I will examine this much discussed paper."

"Ah! This is indeed of interest. Greek of the time when Athens was young. Whoever wrote this was indeed a scholar. Old, very old. But the paper? That is something else. I study old texts. I love the stuff they are written on—stones, clay, skins, papyrus, linen fabrics, silk, and wood. And the ink! A lifetime would not permit a man to become expert in the knowledge of the different inks that were used. If you will pardon me, I will ask my son to examine the paper and the ink. It will not take long and we are not busy."

"While you are doing it, I will order lunch for the three of us," suggested the American. In twenty minutes he returned followed by three waiters carrying large trays.

"And now," said Dr. Hartwig, as the last morsel of food was eaten, "while my son studies the paper, I will talk to you about the translation of the text. It contains three paragraphs. The first one describes an oasis in the Arabian Desert, called the Oasis of Orasis. It tells precisely where it is and the exact route there. The second paragraph is—well, perhaps it would be better to pass on to the third. This is an exhortation to all who love the beauty of jewels to make the journey. There seems to be a price demanded; also a hint of some reward. The first and third paragraphs are easily read and perhaps easy to understand. It was probably the second paragraph which puzzled my American students. It reads something like this:

"There the lovers of the goddess find consolation in her embrace. Then, casting forth the delicacies of the banquet table, the spotted ones, bending backward, slowly journey to the place of their beginnings."

Bradley shook his head. "That is almost word-for-word the translation I got in America," he explained. "But what does it mean, if it has a meaning? Perhaps it is some form of cipher."

"It seems to be rather plain," replied the savant. "First the lover of jewelry is told the exact location of an oasis in the Arabian Desert. Perhaps it is the temple of an old goddess. The men who journey there find pleasure, but they also find their death. At least such an interpretation could be given to the sentence '*slowly journey to the place of their beginnings*.' The third paragraph urges the reader to make the journey if he is in search of beauty. This is an old manuscript and, in spite of it being written in Greek, it has an oriental touch. Does it refer to feminine beauty? Or to the beauty of precious stones? Perhaps both, as they have always been nearly synonymous. However, irrespective of that, it seems to be an invitation to visit the temple with the implied promise of a most pleasurable experience."

"Although it all sounds reasonable, it still does not explain anything," protested the San Franciscan. "It does not interpret the phrases, '*the spotted ones*' and '*bending backwards*'. Besides my brother did not know Greek nor did he collect old manuscripts."

"It was sent to him. He had it translated. The one who sent it knew that he loved jewelry. I am certain that in some way it is connected with his disappearance. At least it provides a reason for his leaving the United States."

Just then the son joined them.

"This is all very interesting," he said. "The only really old part of the manuscript is the parchment. The ink is modern, quite similar to that used some years ago in counterfeiting old manuscripts in Vienna. Father and I worked on, examined and

investigated those counterfeits in order to give an opinion on their authenticity. The parchment is of the type first used about 1100 A.D. I have studied it carefully under the violet ray. The original writing was a deed made in Italy. This was erased and then acid was used to give the parchment the appearance of greater age. Someone simply took an old deed, cleaned it and again wrote on it. It is all so cleverly done that I'm sure an average student of old manuscripts would be deceived."

"I thought it was something like that," remarked Dr. Hartwig. "It looks as though someone prepared this paper for the specific purpose of inducing your brother to make the trip to the oasis, with robbery the real motive. More and more I feel certain that he is dead."

"I do not think so," hotly contested Bradley. "I still have hopes that he is alive."

The old man sighed. "You won't permit yourself to face possibilities," he explained. "You love your brother. But there is fear in your heart. Perhaps your brother also had his fears? At least, he left the paper where you would readily find it. He did not consult you before he left; perhaps he thought you would try to prevent his going. He never returned. I think that he is either dead or a prisoner."

"But why should anyone want to kill him?"

"How can I tell? If the murderer was a woman, the motive may be anything from revenge to the mere sadistic pleasure of killing. Quite probably one reason was the diamonds he took with him."

"They could have robbed him in America!"

"Yes, but that would have been dangerous. You have extremely clever detectives in your country. The thief would have been caught. I have read of your great police. There is one man who has never failed. I have always wanted to meet him."

"I think he would fail in this case," sighed Bradley wearily. "Today I went to the most renowned agency in the world, here in London, and they refused to take the case because they believed they couldn't solve it. What is the name of this American?"

"Taine, of San Francisco."

"*Hellsbells!!*" cried Bradley. "I come from San Francisco. I never heard of him."

"We respected him greatly in Germany," said the son.

"What will you do now?" asked Dr. Hartwig.

"I am on my way to the oasis. I plan to follow the trail of my brother. If he is dead, the killer pays for his crime. If he is a prisoner I will rescue him. No man or woman can mistreat my brother and get away with it. I am dynamite when I get started."

"Are you going alone?"

"Certainly."

"Why not take me with you? I am a linguist and can speak many languages. I have spent some years in Arabia. I might be helpful to you."

"I shall think it over."

"You had better decide now. There is nothing to prevent me going by myself."

"I admit that, but you realize that two separate investigations might add to the chance of failure."

Before Bradley left he had practically promised the doctor he would take him on the Arabian venture.

2

BACK AT HIS HOTEL, the American asked the manager to direct him to the best physician in London. Two hours later he entered the office of Dr. William Parker.

"Why, you are an American," Bradley exclaimed in astonishment.

"I certainly am. What is remarkable about that?"

"But I was told you were the best physician in London."

"Who told you that?"

"The manager of the Central Hotel."

The physician laughed, as he explained: "I found that his asthma came from contact with his pet cat. We eliminated the cat—and the asthma. He thought it was wonderful. He was my first patient. What can I do for you?"

"Make a diagnosis. Suppose a man died and all you knew about it was this paragraph from an old manuscript? *'There the lovers of the goddess find consolation in her embrace. Then, casting forth the delicacies of the banquet table, the spotted ones, bending backward, slowly journey to the place of their beginnings.'* Now tell me what caused the man to die?"

"My first thought is that he died insane."

"No, that must be wrong."

"Sure the man died?"

"Perhaps. Of course, I hope not, but that is the general opinion."

"Where did he die?"

"On the Oasis of Orasis, in the Arabian Desert."

"How do you know?"

For answer Bradley handed the young doctor the complete translation.

"How many have died?" asked the doctor excitedly.

"I don't know. What do I care? All that interests me is the fact that my brother went there six months ago and has not returned."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going there to find out what happened to him. But before I go I want the opinion of a physician. That is why I came to you."

"I have heard," replied the doctor, "that in Africa there is a secret society called the *Order of the Leopards*. They could be called the spotted ones."

"And so could boys who are freckled," retorted Bradley, whose nerves were on edge. "These spotted ones are in Arabia, not Africa, and it is not a secret society. These spotted ones die."

"You think it is a disease?"

"Something kills them."

"And you are going to find out?"

"Yes."

"Why not give the job to a criminologist? How about our own countryman, Taine of San Francisco?"

"You are the second person to suggest that man. He must have

a reputation. I'm from San Francisco and I never heard of him. No, I will probably go alone, though I may take Dr. Hartwig with me."

"Is he a physician?"

"No, a linguist."

"Why not take me? My practice is not large and I am interested. In fact I would be glad to tag along just for the adventure. If it really is a disease, I would like to study it. Will you take me with you?"

"I will," said Bradley. "It would be a good thing to have a physician with us. My brother may be very ill."

Alone in the office, Dr. Parker leaned back in his chair and carefully read the translation. Again and again he reread the second paragraph.

"It is supposed to tell the story of a death," he mused to himself. "Now, what are the symptoms? After falling in love with a woman they cast forth their food. That is easy. Funny I did not immediately see they were nauseated. Then they become the *spotted ones* and *bend backward*. That must be opisthotonus. After that they die. Of what? By gosh, I have it! No, that is too improbable. However it must be considered as a possible diagnosis. If that *is* the disease, then one can be protected against it."

He spent the next four hours reading and the next four days in consultation with several epidermologists. He felt sure that he was on the right track. There was one question that could be answered only by time. If administered in London would the prophylaxis maintain its effectiveness over a long period? At least it was worth a trial. He told Bradley that he wanted to give every one in the party serum treatment. It would take at least four weeks.

"What can I do during the month?" asked the impatient American.

"Send for Taine."

"Not a bad suggestion. I'll do it."

Bradley thought it would take the San Francisco detective at

least two weeks to make the trip to London. Instead he arrived in ten days.

"I took a plane to New York," he said, "but I was detained there for two days waiting reservations across the mighty deep."

"You are in plenty of time," replied Bradley. Looking at the detective he wondered just why he had sent for him, or why anyone should have suggested it. He was a nondescript little man, weighing about one hundred pounds, with an uninteresting, clean-shaven face, the type that is hard to remember. Seated on the average chair his feet barely touched the floor.

In spite of his brusque manner, the rich man was, at heart, very much of a gentleman. He hated to offend anyone and now tried to be as kind as he could under the circumstances.

"I guess a mistake was made in San Francisco, Mr. Taine," he said. "You see I sent a telegram to *Taine of San Francisco*, the detective, requesting him to come to London. I didn't know his first name; so I simply addressed it to *Taine of San Francisco*. It must have been delivered to the wrong Taine. I am truly sorry but I will pay your expenses and whatever you want for your time."

"You have work for a detective, Mr. Bradley?"

"Yes. Sorry about the mistake."

"It was not a mistake. You sent for Taine of San Francisco. There is only one Taine. Now, what is the problem?"

"You don't mean you are *the Taine* with an international reputation?"

"I certainly am."

"Then, all I can ask is *how did you get your reputation?*"

"By merit. When I am engaged to do a job I *do it*. So far, I have a hundred percent batting average. My success is important to my wife. She is the president of a Missionary Society. I give her ten percent of my fees; she gives most of it to the Society and every year they re-elect her president. She is a very wonderful woman. I have two lovely daughters. But when I am home, my wife keeps me busy finding out how the ants get into the house and what is good for moths. She wants me to learn all the latest conventions of contract bridge; but really I lack the

necessary intelligence for such stupendous tasks. My stupidity makes us both unhappy. We get along much sweeter when I am off somewhere working on a mystery that is simple enough for me to grasp. You see I never had a college education and that gives me an inferiority complex, especially when it comes to bridge. Poker is my game. Now what can I do for you?"

"I will call your bluff. If poker is your game, this will suit you," said Bradley laughing, and handed him the now well-known translation. Taine read it once and passed it back.

"Tell me about it," he said.

Bradley did so. Taine was a good listener. At the end of the story he rose from his chair and put on his hat. "That's enough. Leave the rest to me."

"What do you mean?"

"You do not understand. You send for me and tell me your problem. I say that I will take the case and you ask me what I mean? Simply that I will find out what happened to your brother. You pay me when I make my final report. Do you intend going to Arabia?"

"Yes. There will be three of us. Dr. Hartwig, a linguist; Dr. William Parker, a physician, and myself. We leave London in two weeks."

"Two Kings and a Jack," commented Taine. "Now, if you could only add an ace or two, you would have a fair poker hand. Of course a straight or a royal flush would be better because you can never tell what your opponent has. I will report when I have finished the case."

"Then you are not going with us?"

"I wouldn't go with you for all the wealth of London," was the quiet reply. "It would be too dangerous. In my lifetime I have been in many tight places but I always got out alive because I was by myself. I suppose you three men are brave enough, but you might become excited at the wrong time. I am too valuable a person to be the victim of an accident. You need not advance any expense money. I always travel with funds. You and your friends go ahead with your plans. I will see you later and then I will explain your brother's disappearance."

"Hellsbells!" exclaimed the astonished millionaire. "You have more conceit and less reason for it than any man I ever met. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks, but I never smoke. It ruins the delicate enamel of the teeth, and once that is gone, decay soon follows. There is one word of advice: Buy lots of diamond jewelry and broadcast the fact to the reporters. When you go hunting, it is wise to have a decoy; you will make a good one. Goodbye and good luck to you."

He was out of the room before Bradley could think of a suitable retort. That night he unloaded himself to Dr. Hartwig.

"Either Taine or you and I are insane," he exploded. "I don't know what you were thinking to advise me to have him come over here. I should not have hired him."

"I think that you are very nervous and little things annoy you," Dr. Hartwig said calmly. "Taine of San Francisco is probably the greatest detective in the world."

"He must be!" thundered Bradley. "In fact, he admits it."

3

TWO WEEKS LATER the three men embarked for Arabia. They were an extraordinary trio. Bradley, thirty-five, a bachelor, who while accumulating millions had acquired an expanded waistline. Dr. Hartwig, over seventy, wise and kindly faced, white-haired and weighing less than one hundred pounds. Dr. Parker, a Harvard graduate, seventy-four inches tall, blond and more like a Greek god than a native of Kalamazoo. Dr. Hartwig carried all his wealth in his cranium; Dr. Parker had spent hours in the preparation of a well equipped medicine chest, while Bradley blazed with diamonds.

"When you set a trap for a wild animal, you have to bait it with something he's fond of. These jewels are the bait," he explained to his companions.

"Are they real?" asked the astonished Parker.

"It makes no difference. They look real and the newspapers report they are genuine. Did you see the account of them? I

believe that if my brother died, diamonds were the cause. I am following his trail."

"It all adds up to a fantastic dream. I said as much to Taine," commented the physician.

"Did you see him?" asked Bradley sharply.

"He saw me. He said that you had employed him and he wanted to know everything I was doing. That was nearly two weeks ago."

"It is all an ugly phantasmagoria," sighed Dr. Hartwig. "Sometimes my thoughts are burdened by the chill of death. I do not mind death for myself; but you, Mr. Bradley, and you, Dr. Parker, are very young to die. I am glad that Taine is on the case. It gives me a sense of reassurance."

"It gives me nothing but disgust," countered Bradley.

Two weeks later they arrived at Suez, where Dr. Hartwig's knowledge proved increasingly valuable. He knew many of the necessary details for a trip into the desert. Without him, they would have been at the mercy of those who prey on the ignorant tourist.

The day of the camel was passing. The first fifty miles into the desert were made in a jalopy which inspired little confidence in its durability. However they made their objective, an isolated oasis. Here they met an old Arab who had patriarchal control of a family of twenty assorted wives, children and grandchildren and an equally varied assortment of horses, camels, and sheep. Because his name was long and difficult to pronounce he was addressed as Ali.

Of more importance than his name was the fact that he was a Mason and Dr. Hartwig, during a previous sojourn in Arabia, had met him in a Blue Lodge. After a few happy reminiscences the ancient Arab and the aged German retired to a tent.

"We are on a journey to an oasis by the name of Orasis," explained the doctor. "I have looked at many maps, old and new, and I think that I have located it. I have prepared a map for your information."

Ali took the map, looked at it and tore it to bits.

"Brother," he explained with a smile, "you are now talking to

a man born in the desert. What I know I know. I can take you to this place with my eyes shut."

"Have you been there?"

"I have. As a boy, as a man and as an ancient. There is water there and a fort built by the old Romans. For centuries it was uninhabited. As a boy, my brother and I visited the place in search of buried treasures. All we found were bones. During the last four years I have taken rich men, men who loved jewelry, men burning with love of adventure and the lure of the unknown to that place. I took them there and left them. I receive much silver for taking people to places in the desert they could not reach without me."

"You left them?"

"Yes. What else was there to do? They came to me and asked to be taken to Orasis. There have been five men in four years. I left them there, because that was their desire."

"You and I are brothers," whispered the old linguist. "What is secret between us is secret. Tell me why they wanted to stay?"

"Because of the woman."

"So there is a woman?"

"There is. Since God made Adam, our first parent, there has always been a woman. He knows in His great wisdom why He made her, but this we both know, because we are old, that had Adam slit the throat of Eve after the first night, much misery might have been avoided."

"Maybe you're right. I want you to take us to this place and this woman. I want you to bring us back after we have done what is written we shall do. Will you do this for me?"

"I will. I'm an old man and it doesn't matter what happens to me. You are also old and you can die only once. I will take my son with me. He knows the desert and can serve us. Are the men with you also Brothers?"

"They say so, but I have never sat with them. However, we will test them."

"My son has also been in the East. I will vouch for him. Test your friends, and, if they are worthy, we will form a Lodge and

thus be tied together. It is best to go as Brothers; then, if one dies, the others will be glad to go with him."

Dr. Hartwig called the two Americans. In the shadow of the tent questions were asked and answered, grips given and received, the Word was given in a whisper.

"I am satisfied," Dr. Hartwig said at last.

"I also," replied Ali. "These men are indeed Brothers."

"Then you will take us to Orasis, and stay until we leave?"

"I will. But it may be that we shall stay a long time. The place has an evil name. I have taken five men there, and where they now are I do not know."

"Was one of them my brother? He left America a year ago. A big man with a lot of jewelry." Bradley was more than excited. The trail was growing hot.

"The last man I took there was very fond of diamonds; he wore the treasures of Suliman on his fingers. He had black hair, and a gold tooth. He said that he was from America and his name was Bill. I never knew his last name. When I asked him for it he simply laughed and said, 'Call me Bill.' Was he your brother?"

"That was my brother," answered Bradley, shivering in spite of the heat. He wanted to believe that his brother was still alive, but it was not easy to do so.

Once again alone, the two old men gave each other the grip of the Order. "Two old lions of the desert," said Ali proudly.

After a week's journey the five men arrived at the Oasis of Orasis. For six days they had traveled over an ocean of sand, seeing neither tree, water nor human life. Now the journey was at an end.

In the oasis was an old fort or temple. Well built by the Romans, it had resisted the ravaging of centuries and was remarkably preserved. From a distance there was no sign of life, except for the trees and some vultures hovering in the air.

"What are they called?" asked Dr. Parker. He had an almost boyish interest in everything he saw.

"Death!" answered the old Arab.

Ali's son made camp in the shadow of the palm trees and thorn bushes. Ali sat on the sand, silent, looking into the

distance. Late in the afternoon a negro limped through a gate in the fort's wall, making signs inviting them to follow him. When they questioned him, he indicated that he was a deaf mute. When they hesitated to accept his invitation he turned and disappeared within the stone building.

"One touched by the finger of God," commented Ali gravely. "He cannot talk; he cannot hear; he has the mind of a child and limps. In some ways he is happier than we. There is no doubt that he carried an invitation from someone, but it is best for us to remain outside tonight. You three sleep. My son and I will watch. Tomorrow we may venture inside and see what there is to see. There is but one God and Mohammad is His Prophet and we can die but once in a lifetime."

"Those birds are settling on the stones," said Dr. Parker.

"They have been well fed," observed the Arab's son.

The next morning the feeble-minded negro boy again visited them. This time he brought wine and some dates. By signs he invited them to follow him.

"I will go in by myself," exclaimed Bradley. "This is my business and I am going to attend to it."

"If you do, there are two fools here," declared Ali. "You and the slave are brothers. I feel that it is wrong for you to go alone."

"It is my party and I am paying the bills," cried the American angrily. "I want to know what happened to Bill. The people in there may have some information. I will take a revolver and if I fire twice you can rush the place."

"What is written is written," replied Ali. "Go in peace, and if you need us we will come. In the meantime we will not eat the dates nor drink the wine they sent us. I would advise you not to break bread while you are away from us. I know the ways of the desert; much of this I do not like."

IN SPITE OF HIS ADVICE Bradley went with the negro. It was nearly dark when he returned.

"I am so glad I came here," he said. "We had the whole situation summed up wrong. It appears that Bill is alive, although he is not here, either as a prisoner or dead. But he *was* here."

"Tell us about it," urged Dr. Parker, "or we will explode from curiosity. Here we have been cooking all day in the sun and worrying about you and you come back cool as a cucumber."

"It was very interesting. I followed the boy into the ruins and soon came to a tastefully furnished room. There I was met by a middle-aged man and his daughter. He is rather distinguished, while she is as beautiful a woman as I have ever seen. I did not have to ask about Bill; she told me about him. Bill spent a month here as their guest; then he left and told them that he was going to India and then home by way of Japan. It must have been true because she showed me a ring Bill had given her. I would have known that ring among a thousand, because I gave it to him. I asked her about the old manuscript. She did not seem to know much about it except that there are all kinds of stories about the place being an old temple where an Asiatic goddess was worshipped.

"After dinner she retired from the room and her father told me the story of their life. He came from Austria. His daughter was educated in Paris and New York. After her return to Austria he had become involved in politics, and became a refugee, taking with him as much of his wealth as he could convert into cash. Finally he came to live in this oasis which he had bought from some king. I asked him about the five men Ali had brought here. He acknowledged that they had visited him and had left by an eastward route, just as Bill did. It seems that he is contented to stay here the rest of his life, but he is worried about his daughter and would like to see her married before he dies, even intimated that he had invited some of the men to visit him with the hope that one of them might fall in love with the girl. I don't see why they didn't, because she is certainly a nice child."

He paused as though expecting some questions but the men simply looked at him. He continued.

"I did not see the girl again till just before I left. She came into the room and asked me to bring my friends to dinner tomorrow.

I told her we would come at five. She gave me Bill's ring saying that though she prized it highly, it really belonged to me. The food they served was good though most of it was out of tin cans. The negro served at the table. They bought him some time ago from an Arab, more out of pity for him, they said, than because they needed him. Since then he has learned to do different kinds of work for them."

"No one else there?" asked Dr. Hartwig.

"Just the three of them."

"How old was the woman?"

"Perhaps a little over twenty."

"Then your brother was here and left?"

"Yes. I have the ring to show it."

"The ring shows he was here," interrupted Ali, "but how do you know he left?"

"I thought someone would ask that. The girl has heard from Bill twice; once from Calcutta and once from Canton. She showed me the letters and there is no doubt that Bill wrote them. I would recognize his scrawl anywhere."

Ali made a little hole in the sand and spat in it. Then he filled the hole. Looking toward the sky he said, "Our mission is ended. We came here to find a lost brother and we learn he is not here. My son will prepare for our departure. Tonight we will travel and tomorrow Orasis will see nothing but vultures, eaters of the dead."

"Not a bad idea," exclaimed Bradley. "You men were kind to bring me here but there is no reason for you to stay. However, I am going to visit a while. The Austrian is an interesting man, and, now that I am here, there is no reason for leaving so soon."

"I think I will stay also," said Dr. Parker. "While Bradley is being entertained by the father, I will become acquainted with the daughter. She sounds interesting. How about it, Bradley?"

"I think you had better go back with Dr. Hartwig."

"Just for that I am staying. What are your plans, Dr. Hartwig?"

"I will stay until tomorrow. I think it would be best to accept their invitation. Will you go with us, Ali?"

"No. My son and I will remain here and eat dates and drink water. There are some things I don't understand; when I do not understand I simply wait for the morning."

Later in the evening when the two Americans were sleeping, the old linguist walked over to Ali who sat silently watching the moon.

"What does it mean, my friend?" he whispered.

"All my life I have lived in the desert. I know it as a rat knows his hole. There is no caravan route from Orasis to the east. The woman lied to Bradley. I think that the five men never left this place. The vultures have learned to come here."

"How can we make the boys understand that?"

"We cannot. When God wants to destroy a man, He places a beautiful woman in his pathway. All we can do is wait and strike at the right time. You might speak to Dr. Parker. He has not seen her and may have some judgment left in his soul."

The next morning Dr. Hartwig took Parker aside. "Ali is worried. He thinks something is wrong. He feels that we should try to get Bradley to leave at once. Will you help?"

"I certainly will. I think that if Bradley really loves his brother, he should continue his search. As far as I am concerned, I am going to stay here. I like it."

"Do you know what will happen to you?"

"Certainly. I am young, unmarried, and here is a beautiful, cultured, rich woman who desires a husband. I know perfectly well what I am doing."

That ended the conversation.

The same afternoon the three men walked into the temple. The Austrian, Souderman, received them with continental courtesy. Cigarettes were smoked, cocktails drunk, polite conversation exchanged. Then the slave entered and motioned Bradley to follow him. This the American did. He was led through long passages, cool and dimly lighted.

As Bradley entered a room at the end of the hall, the slave disappeared. The rich man was in a room from the Arabian Nights, complete, even to the princess.

Facing the door was a huge oriental divan covered with rich

tapestries and piled high with silken cushions. Among these Astar Souderman reclined, more bewitching than ever in filmy Egyptian robes.

"Come, sit beside me and talk to me," she invited. "I am very lonely. Men come and go, but none stay. Do you suppose they do not like me?"

Bradley declared that, in his opinion, the other men were fools; that they were completely lacking in appreciation of a beautiful woman. He said he could thank his brother for his dullness. He said all this and a thousand other things a man will say when he has become infatuated with a woman. For nearly an hour he babbled on, then began punctuating his remarks with kisses. Finally he asked her to marry him, painting a fascinating picture of life in San Francisco. She promised to marry him if her father consented. Bradley had walked on cold stones on the way to her room, but, leaving it, he seemed to float on air.

Within ten minutes after he rejoined the men in the library, Dr. Parker, in response to the beckoning slave, slipped from the room unobserved. Down the same low hall, into the same room, he followed the footsteps of Bradley to meet the blonde siren. His reception was more spontaneous and amorous than Bradley's had been. Bradley was clumsy, fat, middle-aged, but Parker was clever, adept, responsive and handsome. When he proposed marriage, she did not say that she would have to ask her father, but promised to marry him at once; promised him with warm clinging kisses.

At supper everyone was tense. The laughter was forced and brittle. The inane conversation lagged. Astar Souderman was impartial with her smiles. Her father continued the role of the suave and perfect host. During dessert he proposed that the three men leave their uncomfortable tents and move into the old ruins, where, he assured them, they would be more at ease. They accepted; even Dr. Hartwig agreed that the suggestion was a good one. They decided to get their baggage and return that evening.

When they told Ali of their plans he seemed unconcerned and

said that he and his son would remain in the oasis until he had orders to leave.

"I think the others will soon go back," Bradley told him. To the other men he said, "I want you to know that I proposed to Astar this afternoon. She promised to talk to her father and obtain his consent to our marriage."

"How about your brother?" questioned Dr. Hartwig.

"Oh! He is probably all right. At least, he is old enough to care for himself," was the laughing answer.

Dr. Parker said nothing.

5

The next five days passed quietly. Most of the time the old linguist was entertained in the library by Suderman. The two young men played cards with Astar and, as opportunity afforded, made love to her, each fondly believing himself her accepted suitor.

During the afternoon of the fifth day, Dr. Parker strolled into the library. Dr. Hartwig was not there. Neither Bradley nor Hartwig was in his room. Finally he returned to the library where he found Astar talking with her father.

"I am sick," he cried, vomiting.

"The poor boy!" exclaimed Astar. "Take off his shirt, Father, and see if the spots are there. Oh! Look at them! Hundreds of spots. I never saw such a case."

While she was talking Dr. Parker groaned and slowly his body bent till he rested on his head and heels and he remained thus in toxic rigidity.

"I guess that settles it," said Astar. "You get the stretcher and we will take him out there. It certainly was easy to make fools of these three men." She laughed as she looked at Souderman lovingly.

Dr. Parker groaned.

"I am sick. What is the matter with me?"

"My dear young man," explained Souderman. "You have the early symptoms of cerebro-spinal or spotted fever. You

contracted it when you kissed my wife. You should not be so generous with your kisses. So many poor simpletons kiss her and die. Too bad, but what of it?"

But Dr. Parker had become unconscious and did not hear him. He woke with flapping wings close above him.

"Have to stay awake," he muttered, rising to a sitting position. "Have to stay awake till morning, anyway. That ipecac certainly worked like a charm, as far as vomiting was concerned, but it makes a man weak as a newborn kitten. Wish I had a flashlight. Ali said the vultures only attack dead men. That may save me."

The night was one of torture and seemingly endless. When at last daylight penetrated his prison the physician saw that he was at the bottom of a large dry well, over twenty feet in diameter and about fifty feet deep. Scattered on the sand were white, well-picked bones—unmistakably human bones. Directly in front of him was a fairly large aperture. Turning his head he saw Bradley and Dr. Hartwig sleeping a few feet behind him. At once he examined them, felt their pulse, tested their reflexes and their pupils.

"Drugged!" he exclaimed. "And nothing can be done until the effect of the narcotic wears off. Perhaps they would be better off dead. I thought that I was clever but those hellcats were just a bit smarter. The situation seems hopeless. In the end we will be added to the boneyard. Perhaps there is a way out. How about that big hole?"

He walked over and peered in. Nothing but darkness and stench. As he was about to turn away he heard the sound of shuffling feet and heavy breathing. To his amazement an emaciated man, in rags, walked slowly out of the hole.

"Who are you?" asked Dr. Parker.

"I used to be Bill Bradley. I don't know who I am now. Looks as though that hellcat is still at her games."

"We came here looking for you. Your brother is here, drugged and still asleep. The man near him is Dr. Hartwig and my name is Parker. Man, but you must have been sick!"

"Sick is no name for it. I can't see why she didn't let me die long ago. But every day she sent food and water down on a rope.

Of course she knew I would go West some day. The other fellows did."

He staggered over to the sleeping men and bent over his brother.

"Poor boy," he sighed. "Why did he come here?"

Dr. Parker could not restrain his curiosity. "Tell me one thing. Did you make love to the woman? Kiss her and all that sort of thing?"

"I did. Damn fool that I was!"

"Then she got you. She infected all of you men with the spotted death. The other men died. You lived because you were too rugged to die and she did not have the courage to slit your throat. By this time she must have millions of dollars worth of jewelry. I suppose she and Souderman will leave us to the vultures."

It was another twelve hours before the drugged men awoke and still longer before they were able to appreciate fully what had happened to them. The joy of the brothers in being united was embittered by the realization that death seemed imminent. Dr. Parker told them his experience.

"When I hunted for you and could not find you, I decided that you had been put away somewhere, and if I became sick I would be put with you. I painted my body with a lot of little spots using mercurochrome, took a big dose of ipecac and simulated opisthotonus. It was a good enough resemblance to spotted fever to deceive the woman. She is evidently a carrier of the germ in her throat and infected her victims by kissing them. She was not sure about Bradley, so she drugged him and Dr. Hartwig, whom she had never been able to vamp, was given a dose of the same narcotic. The pair are not father and daughter but husband and wife. They enticed their victims here, infected them with cerebro-spinal fever and then threw them into this well, after taking their jewelry. We were not infected because of the prophylactic injections we took before leaving London. Now the entire mystery is solved. They will probably pick off Ali and his son with rifles and make their getaway."

"Is there no way out?" asked Dr. Hartwig.

"None except with a rope. I have been here for months and I ought to know," answered William Bradley, with a twisted smile.

But in an hour the face of Ali appeared over the rim of the well. He threw down a rope and first pulled up Dr. Hartwig. Then they drew up Dr. Parker and after that the rest was easy. In another hour they were all in Souderman's library.

"Where are Souderman and Astar?" asked the physician.

"They are gone, Allah knows where. We are alone. Until you men, especially Bill, have recovered your strength, we will remain here in peace, for the danger has left us."

"With several million dollars worth of jewels," sighed Bradley. "However there is no need to worry about that. I was lucky to find Bill. We are all alive so the ending is far better than it might have been."

Three weeks later they arrived at Suez and were met by the Chief of Police.

"I am glad you are here at last," he said. "An authoritative secret message came some weeks ago, directing me to hold three persons as prisoners. While no charges were made against them the message said that you would make a full statement about them when you arrived. What about it?"

At the police headquarters they found Souderman, Astar, and the deaf and dumb negro. There was also a large box of jewels, many of which were easily identified as belonging to the Bradley brothers.

"In my opinion," Dr. Hartwig said, "these two can be held on many charges. The murder charge will be hard to prove unless we can learn the names of the four men who went to the oasis and died there. After you hear our story I believe you will be willing to hold them without bail. But the slave is certainly not guilty and should be released, though what is to be done with him is a question. The poor fellow has had a hard time of it."

"We will take care of him in some way," the Chief replied. "No use turning him loose, because he would be kidnapped and resold at once."

"Perhaps I will take him back home with me," said Bradley.

That night the four men were having supper in their rooms at the hotel. There came a knock at the door and when it was opened, there stood Taine, of San Francisco.

"Good evening, Gentlemen," he said quietly. "I thought it was time to report to you about that oasis case."

"Are you still working on that?" shouted Bradley. "Don't you know it is all finished and that my brother has been found? As a detective you would make a fine dumb-bell salesman. Get out and stay out!"

"I cannot blame you for being irritated, Mr. Bradley," was the unruffled reply. "But I helped you a little. Will you listen to my report?"

"Better let him tell his story," advised Dr. Hartwig.

"All right, but make it mighty brief. When I think of engaging you for a detective, Taine, I feel like running around and giving myself a swift kick. What did you do and how did you do it?"

"Really, it was all rather simple. I felt that it was necessary to be at the oasis before you arrived. Here in Suez I went into disguise as a deaf and dumb and slightly feeble-minded Ethiopian, and then hired some Arabs to take me to the oasis and sell me to the people there. The Arabs told Astar that they intended to kill me if they could not sell me, and she, being kindhearted and unable to see anyone suffer, bought me. I made myself useful; within a few days I was lowering food and water down to Mr. William Bradley. When you came I was not certain what would happen. I knew you were protected against the germs. After you were placed in the well I had to work fast, because it would have been an easy matter for them to kill the Arabs. So, as gently as possible, I blackjacked them, bound them and called in Ali and his son. We decided that it would be best for the son to deliver the gentle pair to the police, but Ali did not want to tell you lest your pride suffered. I identified myself to the Suez Chief of Police, but asked him, as a special favor, not to drag me into the report. I thought it would please you to have the papers say you were the ones who had won the poker game. That is all except

one more incident: Astar dosed your wine with bichloride of mercury, but I threw it away and substituted morphine. That is why Mr. Bradley and Dr. Hartwig are alive today. I did my little bit."

"A little bit," shouted Bradley. "Why, man, we owe you our lives. We would have died had it not been for you."

"You may not have solved the mystery, but you certainly were our salvation," insisted Dr. Hartwig.

"I think I solved the mystery before I left London. When I heard of the manuscript, I believed it was the work of a very clever forger. It occurred to me that Jempson, than whom there is no better, had not been heard of for several years. He had a woman, Diamond Sally, who had been arrested in San Francisco for robbery, but could not be kept in jail because she was a carrier of epidemic cerebro-spinal fever. She was quarantined but after five months escaped and was off the police records for several years. I decided that the woman was certain to be with the forger, Jempson.

"When I read about the spotted ones in the translation, I was almost certain that it was the clever work of Diamond Sally and Jempson. The fact that the men who went to the oasis had plenty of diamonds confirmed my suspicions. As soon as I saw Souderman and Astar I had no trouble in identifying them as the criminals. This also explains the letters Souderman showed Mr. Bradley as coming from his brother Bill. He wrote them himself after he found out who you were, Mr. Bradley. Now about my charges: How would fifty thousand dollars do? And perhaps three nice rings for my wife and daughters? And please remember, Mr. Bradley, I may not be the greatest detective in the world, but I am still good enough to be called *Taine of San Francisco*."



THE SILVER BULLET

by Phyllis A. Whitney

FOG WRITHED UP FROM the hollow of Loon Valley and crawled thick and yellow before the headlights of the car. Ramsay's hands tightened on the wheel as he swung away from destruction and back onto the muddy, unseen road. He glanced once at the white-lipped woman beside him and then gave his attention to the obscurity that whirled beneath the wheels of the car. "We can't go on," he said at last. "It's impossible to see the road. I can't risk it."

From the corner of his eye he could see the convulsive movement of the woman's hands in her lap. "Linda!" he warned.

Again her hands twitched. "It's this beastly fog. It has a slimy feel against my face—as though I'd been touched by a slug. We *must* go on, Gordon."

Quietly he applied the brakes. He could feel the sucking of the tires as the car came to a halt in the mud. The woman gave a little moan of despair and sank back in her seat. He watched her for a moment in silence, trying to recall MacDonald's exact words.

"You should be reassured!" she cried mockingly.
"You see — I'm not a witch. If I were, the very touch
of silver would burn me."

illustration
by Vincent
Napoli



How had the doctor put it? That if ever she were to overcome her strangeness, these whims of Linda's must not go unchallenged. "My dear," he said, "we've come here to help you—to hunt back to the very beginnings of your life and lay them in the open. Once we've discovered the reason, the origin of these nervous spells, we can exorcise them and you'll be well again."

"Exorcise!" she repeated. "What a horrible word! As though I were possessed by devils." She laughed with a faint note of

hysteria in her voice, only to break off as the sound struck flatly against the crawling wall of fog.

Ramsay lowered the window beside her and stared into the writhing darkness. "Look!" he cried, suddenly eager. "I do believe we're near a house. Isn't that a light?"

The fog thinned, drew aside its heavy folds and then rolled soundlessly back upon its tracks again. In the instant of clearing, however, the light had been visible—a square, dim eye in the mountain above them. "We'll go there," he said, "and ask for directions. Perhaps we can find a place to put up for the night."

Linda sat motionless as he got out and went around the car to open her door. "We shouldn't have come, Gordon. My mother must have had some terrible reason for sending me away from Loon Mountain with strangers when I was a baby. There's something revolting about the very name of the place. Loon Mountain! I've said it over and over to myself until it begins to sound like the words of an idiot."

Ramsay took her arm impatiently. These fantasies of his wife's were beyond the understanding of his own practical mind. He knew only that he must follow MacDonald's directions and get to the bottom of the thing.

Brambles caught at their ankles as they struggled toward the light, and once a fog-wet branch slapped across their cheeks. "It *is* slimy," Linda said, wiping the moisture from her face with a quick gesture of disgust.

The eye grew larger as they stumbled up the hillside, and they were able to discern the wavering black outline of a building through the fog. Two pointed gables pierced the night like the pricked ears of a wolf, while across the entire front stretched a ramshackle veranda, its cracked palings forming an eerie broken-toothed grin.

Ramsay lifted his fist to the door, and at the first echo of his knock the gleaming eye of the window was wiped from existence, leaving the night darker than before. There was a faint, clicking sound from the room beyond, and although he could see nothing, the man received the strange impression of a human eye staring at him through a knothole in the door.

Linda's hand lay heavily upon his arm. "Come away!" she whispered.

But even as she spoke, light reappeared at the window and the door was pulled inward, leaving the two upon its threshold blinking in the flood of light. A woman stood in the opening with her back to the illumination, so that her face and the details of her person were invisible.

"What do you want?" she asked in a voice which, heard there on the lonely mountainside, seemed possessed of an odd, metallic beauty.

"The fog made it unsafe for driving," Ramsay said. "We were bound for Loon Mountain—the town on Loon Mountain."

"*This* is Loon Mountain," the woman told him, continuing to stand uninvitingly in the doorway. "But the town is five miles down the road."

"Five miles!" Ramsay echoed. "It might as well be a hundred in weather like this. There's a sheer precipice on the left of the road, and my wife is nervous."

He could see the turning of the woman's body as she moved her eyes. Apparently she was looking at Linda for the first time. "Come in," she said, stepping abruptly back into the room.

The words were more a command than an invitation. Linda obeyed and Ramsay followed his wife through the doorway. Immediately their hostess flung the door shut behind them and Ramsay experienced an odd sense of relief, as if for the first time since they had begun the upward journey from the valley, they had truly escaped the groping fog-fingers.

The woman had crossed the bare floor of the room and was standing beside a deal table, her hands fumbling at a kerosene lamp. She presented a somewhat startling figure to Ramsay's city-accustomed eyes. Her dress was of a heavy dark material, sack-like and without style or shape, while about her head her hair was wound in coil after night-black coil, smooth and gleaming as satin.

Even as he considered her she turned from the lamp and he was able to view for the first time the utter, wild beauty of her face; an alarming beauty that sent his eyes shifting hurriedly to

Linda's own dusky, more passive loveliness. It was a relief to see Linda's yellow, modern little sport dress, her tinted fingernails and the yellow felt hat pulled down upon her dark waves of hair. She seemed so entirely sane and as far removed from this strange, black-clad creature as the sunshine of noonday was from midnight.

Linda, too, had felt the spell of the other's beauty. She was staring with velvet-dark eyes that seemed abnormally large in the whiteness of her face.

"Now that we know just how far the town is," she said hesitantly, "perhaps we'd better go on. We can travel slowly and there will probably be a hotel—"

"You can stay here," the woman offered. "This used to be a hotel. We still take people in now and then."

Ramsay accepted quickly, grateful enough to postpone the journey along the mountainside.

Without further speech the woman opened a drawer in the table and drew out a candle which she set in a grease-spattered holder. She had just lighted a match and was bringing it near the wick when, somewhere behind Ramsay, a door was opened. Under ordinary circumstances he would have turned at once to view the newcomer, but something in the utter quiet of the woman in black held his attention.

It was as though all power of motion had been drained from her body at the sound of that opening door. She stood with the candle in one hand and the burning match in the other, and made no effort to bring the two together. There was something horrid in her frozen immobility. Ramsay watched in fascination while the match burned nearer and nearer her fingers. Surely it was singeing her skin. And then, when he was sure that the smell of burning flesh had risen in the room, the tension snapped and with a quick flick of her hand the match was extinguished and hurled to the floor.

She turned and faced the door, and Ramsay turned also, finding his will suddenly freed. Framed against the blackness of the corridor behind him stood a man, a tall, spare individual with darkly yellowed skin, inky hair and the most curious eyes

Ramsay had ever seen. They possessed a flickering, greenish flatness and moved not at all in their sockets, but stared straight ahead while a strange shimmer, like the flutter of green moonlight on water, went on in their depths.

The woman in black moved quickly across the room, threw out a long, slim-fingered hand and shut the door abruptly in that staring face. Then, with no word of explanation, she returned to the lighting of her candle.

Ramsay found himself listening tensely for departing footsteps beyond the door, but there came no sound. Was the fellow still standing there with his flickering eyes fixed upon the closed door, like the eyes of a corpse upon the lid of its coffin? God! what a terrible thought! Was this night going to leave him as nervous and fanciful as Linda?

"I'll fetch our bags from the car," he muttered and went reluctantly back to the fog.

When he returned, the woman was awaiting him with her candle ready. She crossed to the door leading into the corridor, and it seemed to Ramsay that she hesitated for the merest instant before flinging it open. When she did so, the long hallway stretched empty and dark into the far reaches of the house. Linda followed the moving candle, stopping once to look back at Ramsay, her eyes glittering too brightly in the flicker of light.

At the end of the door-lined corridor a staircase presented itself to view, steep and narrow, with steps that creaked beneath the weight of their mounting feet. Again there was a corridor to traverse and again there were closed doors on every side. What was there about a closed door, Ramsay thought, to give him this sense of hidden evil? After all, the many rooms must be vacant, disused, harboring only dust and echoes, and perhaps a stray rat or two.

He was relieved, however, when they came to a halt and their hostess took a key from the pocket of her sack-like dress and fitted it to the keyhole of the last door. It screeched rustily in the lock and the door swung inward.

The room was large, with a bare expanse of dark floor. There

were two iron bedsteads from which the dirty white paint had peeled in layers, one chair, a rickety washstand bearing a white bowl and cracked pitcher, and, as Ramsay saw with relief, a second kerosene lamp.

With the lamp burning, the place seemed more habitable. Their hostess departed for bedclothes and hot water and Linda drew off her felt hat with a weary gesture and laid it on the chair.

"My head feels so tired," she said, "so heavy."

Ramsay opened the two travelling-bags while Linda slipped out of her sport jacket, leaving her arms bare in the sleeveless jumper beneath. Automatically Ramsay's eyes sought her left shoulder. He had learned that the odd little birthmark in the shape of an inverted cross was a gage by which he could reckon the depth of her emotion. When she was happy, calm, the mark was a pale rose, scarcely to be discerned against the smooth skin of her shoulder. It was not pale now, but glowed in a deep vermilion blush. He was suddenly conscience-stricken.

"Linda," he said "if it means so much to you, we can go on even now. If this house frightens you, we won't stay."

She looked at him almost listlessly and began plucking at the pins that bound up her heavy dark hair. "It's too late now." Her voice was without emotion and she stared at him for a second as if at a stranger. "Don't you understand? It's too late!"

The mark on her shoulder flushed to an angrier scarlet. She snatched the hairbrush from her bag and began to brush her hair vigorously, so that it covered her shoulders in a thick mantle and began to gleam with a life of its own.

A knock upon the door bespoke the return of their hostess. She came into the room, her arms laden, and then paused to stare at Linda.

"Your hair!" she said in a low, startled voice.

Linda's brushing hand went steadily on. "Yes—my hair?"

"It's very beautiful. Smooth and sleek—"

"Like yours?" asked Linda softly.

It seemed to Ramsay in that instant that a strange look of understanding passed between the two; then the woman in black shook her head vaguely and turned toward the beds.

There was a long silence while she worked. When she had completed her task, she took a key from her pocket and laid it upon the washstand.

"For the door," she said to Ramsay. "You may want to lock it tonight."

She turned to go, but something in the sheen of Linda's hair seemed to fascinate her so that she paused to lift a long strand in her fingers, revealing the bare shoulder beneath, where the crimson mark burned against the flesh. The woman's eyes widened; her slender fingers clutched convulsively about the strand of hair, then let it slip away from her touch.

"You mustn't stay here!" she gasped. "You must go at once!"

"What do you mean?" Ramsay asked, more startled than he cared to admit.

The woman turned, her black eyes blazing. "Fool! To bring her here! You must go quickly—now!"

Strangely enough it was Linda who remained calm. "It wouldn't be any use to go now. It's too late."

The woman's head with its heavy bands of hair drooped in submission. Then her fingers sought again for the pocket of her dress and she drew forth a small object that shimmered in the light. She pressed the thing into Linda's hand. "I've been keeping this for a long time, but I've never dared use it. Perhaps you will have more courage than I."

She was gone quickly, leaving Linda standing in the middle of the room, staring at the small, silvery thing in her hand.

"What is it?" Ramsay asked. "What was she talking about?"

Linda began to laugh with the old trace of hysteria in her voice. "It's fantastic! Idiotic! A silver bullet. Do you see?"—extending her palm to Ramsay. "A silver bullet!"

"What—" he began, but she broke in upon him, her voice lowered to a whisper.

"Don't you know? Fire and silver for witches and warlocks!"

Her laughter rose shrilly. Ramsay threw one arm about her shoulders and clapped a hand to her mouth. "I won't have you uttering such nonsense!"

She broke away from his grip with a strength that surprised him. "You should be reassured!" she cried mockingly. "You see—I'm not a witch. If I were, the very touch of silver would burn me. But it doesn't. I can hold it in my hand—like this."

"Yes," he said soothingly. "Of course you can."

Gradually her excitement subsided. Her body drooped like that of a weary child and tears came into her eyes. She was very light in his arms as he carried her to the bed. "It isn't true," she whispered. "Tell me it isn't true! I mean—there aren't any witches? There couldn't be—because they hanged them all in Salem."

"Hush!" he said. "There never were any witches except in fairy-tales."

Long after she had slipped into the soft, cool silk of her nightgown, he sat beside her bed, waiting for her to fall asleep. She had thrust the silver bullet beneath her pillow, and its presence seemed to comfort her, for her eyelids ceased to flutter and after a time she slept.

Ramsay quietly locked the door. Then he walked to the one window and endeavored to peer into the night. Fog curled to the very sill, obscuring the mountainside. There was to be no sleep for him, he knew, as he sat down on his cot to watch and wait for dawn. Once daylight came, they would be on their way—out of this terrible Loon Mountain region with its unreal inhabitants and insane talk of witchcraft, away from that strangely beautiful woman and the mad, ghastly creature who had stared through the doorway downstairs. He wished he could erase the memory of the flat, shimmering gaze of the man into whose eyes he had looked so short a while before. Or was it a short while? Somehow his sense of time was vanishing. All memory, all recollection, seemed to consist of two flat-surfaced eyes that stared hypnotically—stared and flickered like some noiseless measure of time.

He blinked and shrugged his shoulders violently. He must stop thinking of those eyes. He must forget them—think about his surroundings, about Linda. He froze into sudden, terror-stricken immobility. The lamp—the kerosene lamp! It was out. But he did

not remember its going. A gray streak of light had begun to crawl through the window. The *open* window. And it was dawn.

He started up from the cot, Linda's name on his lips. And then he saw. Linda's bed was tumbled. The pillow bore the mark of her head, but Linda herself was gone!

He strode to the window and looked out upon the gray and ghostly morning. The fog had cleared a little, but it still lay in wreaths upon the drab shrubbery. The explanation of Linda's going was apparent. What a fool he had been not to examine the window more closely last night!

The room was located at the back of the house, and the window opened immediately upon a narrow veranda, which in turn could be reached by an easy swing from the sloping side of the hill. Out of that window Linda had been spirited while he had sat blindly upon his bed, dreaming of a strange green gaze.

He turned from the window and rushed across to the locked door. The rusty key defied him, only to give suddenly before the force of his twisting fingers. The corridor beyond was silent and filled with night. He gave no thought now to closed doors, but stumbled to the stairway, whose steps shrieked beneath the weight of his plunging feet.

The large room at the front of the house was empty.

He turned back through the corridors, shouting now, waking long-dead echoes with his strident voice. Every moment he expected to see a door open upon the banded head and black-garbed figure of the woman who had admitted him the night before. But no door opened, and when the last echo had died away only a heavy silence came down upon the house.

The silence was more terrible than all the tumult that had gone before. He fought against it, trying the doors systematically, banging upon their panels, but the echoes had a tired sound as though they longed to creep back to their crevices and sleep again through undisturbed years.

Every door was locked, and the corridors, graying now in the dawnlight, gave back only emptiness to his cries. In the end he gave up and returned to the room where Linda had slept.

Perhaps, after all, this was only some terrible nightmare from which he would awake at any moment. Perhaps he would find Linda in her place beneath the bedclothes, her hair dusky against the white pillow. But the room was as empty as the rest of the house.

He sat down upon the one chair and buried his head in his hands, trying to force sanity into his benumbed brain.

After a time he heard a sound that brought him erect and tense, the sound of footsteps upon the porch below, the grating of a key in a lock.

He was out of the room and down the stairway in an instant. The bare front room had a human occupant this time, and he found himself exchanging stares with a little, straight-backed old man who gazed at him in astonishment.

"Well," the fellow drawled after a moment, "an' how did you get in here?"

"I was let in. We took a room for the night—my wife and I. And now my wife has—"

The little man tugged at his gray-peppered beard. "Slow up a bit, stranger. *Who* let you in?"

"Why—the woman who keeps the place. She—"

The old man shook his head. "There ain't no woman who keeps this place. I keep it. But I'm only a sort of caretaker. Nobody lives here any more."

"Do you think I'm mad?" Ramsay shouted. "I tell you a woman let us in last night. And now my wife's disappeared. I've got to find her!"

"If you've really lost somebody, I'll try an' help you. My name's Samuels. An' if you'll go ahead and give me the whole story without gettin' too excited about it, we'll see what we kin do."

How he got through that day, Ramsay never knew. He told his story to a dozen apathetic men of the countryside and each one shook his head in apparent doubt as to the teller's sanity. There was no such woman as he described on Loon Mountain. There was no one who could possibly have let him into the house. Some doubt was expressed as to the existence of Linda, until

Ramsay brought down the yellow sport dress and shook it before their puzzled eyes.

Finally a search party was organized and sent out to scour the mountain. Ramsay remained behind. He had the strange feeling that somehow Linda might come back of her own accord, and she must not return to find him gone.

It was not until early evening that Samuels reappeared. He came into the room with a certain hesitancy in his step.

"I—I guess we've found her," he said, his bleared old eyes avoiding Ramsay's. "There's a gravel pit up yonder on the mountain."

"Where is she?" Ramsay cried, shaking the man's shoulder.

"Don't be in a hurry, son. It's too late for hurry now."

The significance of his words began to make itself felt. "What do you mean? She—she's not hurt?"

"I hate to tell you, son. We—we found her at the bottom of the pit. Her—neck's broken, I guess."

Ramsay could only stare in horror. This was a nightmare! Why, only last night he and Linda—his eyes moved in slow fascination toward the veranda and the steps.

It was true, then. They were bringing her in now. His Linda. Her head was twisted terribly so that the black coils of her hair hung across her face and dripped toward the floor. The soft silk of her gown was muddled and torn, and against the dead white skin of her shoulder the tiny mark of an inverted cross stood out, livid and colorless.

There was a bench against one wall and the bearers laid their pitiful burden upon it and turned away.

Very gently Ramsay lifted the heavy strands of hair from her face and stared into the dark, sightless eyes. In the first instant of his looking the shock was too great to register properly. Then realization swept upon him—and relief. The face turned so blindly toward him was the face of that dark, strange woman of the night before.

He turned quietly to the uneasy men. "This is not my wife," he said.

He knew by the quick, sidelong glances they exchanged that they thought him mad. One after another turned away from him.

"Don't you know this woman?" he cried. "I tell you *she* is the one who let us in last night!"

Samuels looked down at the pale face. "She's not from hereabouts, I'd know if she was."

Perhaps in that instant Ramsay did go a little mad. Blank futile walls seemed to be crowding upon him, crushing all thought, all power of reasoning. He sank onto a chair in a corner and sat with his face pressed into the cold dampness of his hands.

As the long moments slid away, it seemed to him that something hateful and malevolent was crowding itself into his consciousness. He steeled his mind against its onslaught, but the sense of a malicious shadow encroaching upon his reason persisted. He began to see with an intense clarity that he knew would be the last before the oblivion of madness swept down upon him—unless, by the strength of his own will, he could overthrow the menace.

Drunkenly he staggered to his feet and snatched up the heavy cylinder of the smoking lamp.

"Get out!" he cried. "All of you!" And he advanced upon the roomful waving the lamp like a vengeful torch.

At once the pressure upon his brain subsided. The people of Loon Mountain faded from the room and Ramsay knew the thing that was required of him if he was to save himself and reach Linda. He must be as cunning as the dark forces leagued against him. Never again must he give way to despair, thus opening a doorway to all evil. And he must fight alone. By some strange intuition he knew that all the mountainside was against him—little men like Samuels, with blurred and shifty eyes, crowding their lies upon him; driving him with a slow, devilish persistence until his mind would abandon its last outpost and they would be rid of him for ever.

They knew the identity of that tragic figure well enough. Of that he was certain. But they sought to bemuse him with their cunning until his reason recoiled so that he would take the dead woman and return to the world, a chattering simpleton, unaware that Linda remained behind.

Lamp in hand, Ramsay crossed the room and lifted the cloth from the face of the woman who lay upon the bench. How terrible she was in death! How bitterly beautiful! He stood for minutes, staring down upon her utter pallor, as if by the very force of his gaze he would draw out the secret—the dark mystery—from the languor of death.

Who was she? How came Linda's gown upon her bruised body? And what was the meaning of that mark upon her shoulder? Where lay the key to this entanglement of Linda's life and hers?

Overcoming a certain repugnance, he lifted a strand of hair that shrouded her shoulder and bent close above the mark. It was indeed the duplicate of the cross which Linda bore upon her upper arm. He allowed the hair to glide from his fingers absently and was startled to see the woman's head twist suddenly to one side.

It was the weight of the hair, he told himself, but the movement sent a chill of horror through his veins. It was as though the woman on the bench had, by some horrible power, twisted her head in order to stare past him with her wide, dead gaze. He followed the direction of that stare with his own eyes, fascinated in spite of himself.

It was then he saw the rifle, half shadowed by the open door which led to the hall. He crossed the room in an instant and snatched it up, his mind clear, his body ready for action. The feel of the weapon gave him back a sense of reality, brought release from the frenzy that had come down upon him with his first sight of Linda's empty bed.

The gun was unloaded, but there must be ammunition about the house. Once armed, he would not be afraid to venture into the mysteries of Loon Mountain. Somewhere out in the smother of darkness Linda was waiting for him to come to her help. He had failed her long enough.

But there was no ammunition to be found. He recalled then the silver bullet that Linda had placed beneath her pillow. That might serve, and it would be better to have a single shot in the gun than none at all.

He stumbled up the stairs and down the long corridor to the bedroom. Eagerly his fingers sought beneath the pillow. It was there! The cool silver made a talisman against the crowding shadow of the house as he went back down the stairs. He recalled Linda's words of the night before, less ready now to laugh them to scorn. Too many dark and unintelligible things had happened since then.

The bullet had evidently been cast for this very rifle. He

slipped it into the chamber and then went out into the waiting silence of Loon Mountain.

Fog again! An undulating world of fog that twined slimy gray tentacles about him, thrusting him back and down with a weight that pressed upon his spirit rather than his body; that tugged at his eyelids and raised within him so deep a desire for sleep that he could scarcely deny the impulse.

He did deny it, however, with the new power that the knowledge of the loaded gun had given him. Straight up into the wet shrubbery of the mountainside he strode, and so heavy was the fog that the light from the open door behind him vanished instantly from view. For a little while he walked aimlessly, and then, in one of those rare moments when the fog rolled to a higher level, his eyes made out a difference in shading in the gray wall ahead—a flaking of yellow, as though a bonfire in some hollow cast a reflection upon the ceiling of fog.

The gravel pit! He began to move more warily, and as he advanced, the flicker of light grew clearer as it beat against the heavy atmosphere. The sound of a voice rose suddenly from the void ahead, chanting in a dreadful, unknown tongue.

Forewarned, Ramsay dropped to his knees and squirmed across the wet ground, snake-like on his belly. Gone was his assurance now, gone all reason; gone, too, his desire for sleep. His flesh crept at the hideous tautophony of that voice, and a horror greater than any he had ever known swept through him.

Involuntarily he closed his eyes as he crept forward, dreading the moment when the veil would be torn from his vision and he would look down upon the horror in the pit below. His groping fingers found the edge of a precipice, light flared against his closed lids and an odor rose to his nostrils— an odor of rot, of death and decay.

He pressed his face into the clean, damp earth for a long moment; then with a quick lift of his head he opened his eyes and fixed his gaze upon the scene below. A shudder passed through every limb and cold drops of sweat trickled down the sides of his face. Always and for ever the thing that was happening in the gravel pit would be etched upon his brain.

There was no bonfire as he had expected, but only the pin-point flaring of a myriad candles, burning aslant in the stifling hollow of the pit as they moved in a crawling, everlasting

circle, carried backward by a multitude of black-shrouded figures. The circling candles were horrid enough, but it was the naked, obscene thing which lay in the center of the circle that set Ramsay shuddering with repugnance.

Perhaps at one time it had been a man, but so hideously and unspeakably had it been mutilated that it was now a mere heap of quivering flesh stretched upon a sacrificial block. With an effort Ramsay tore his eyes from the beastly sight and his heart gave a stifling leap as he did so.

Two figures had stepped from the obscurity beyond the circling lights. One of these was the man with the green, flat gaze. The other was Linda, white-robed and more dreadfully beautiful than he had ever seen her. About her naked shoulders the black coils of her hair moved uncannily with a strange life of their own. Her eyes were set and staring, and in her extended hands she held a small black bowl, against the edges of which trembled a murky liquid.

The man with the green eyes lifted a dark, thin hand, while the abominable voice in the background chanted on and on. "Drink!" he commanded.

Slowly, with unseeing eyes, the woman raised the bowl to her lips, and in doing so, half turned toward the evil gaze of the man at her side.

Ramsay's voice grated from his throat in a harsh scream that he barely recognized as coming from his own lips. "Linda!"

The woman started violently, so that liquid spurted from the bowl in her fingers and left a spatter of scarlet against her white robe. The gaze which commanded hers, wavered not at all at the cry. The man's swarthy hand was still raised in its gesture of command.

"Drink!" he repeated softly.

Again Ramsay screamed. "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

The black figures in the pit ceased their backward circling for an instant and he was aware of faces tilted curiously toward him—faces he seemed to recognize—Samuels' bleared eyes and the faces of his mountain neighbors. Then the heads turned and the low sound of a dreadful laughter rose upon the night.

So they *were* in league against him—these dwellers on Loon Mountain? This, then, was their reason for refusing to recognize

the dead woman? They were banded together by a dreadful alliance, sworn to oppose his search for Linda.

Was his gun impotent? Was he helpless against the malevolent power of the man in the pit below? Man—or warlock?

He raised the butt of the gun to his shoulder and rested the barrel upon the edge of the precipice. One shot only was allowed him. He dared not miss. Those below were paying no attention now, circling again in the eery light. Once more Linda had lifted the black bowl to her lips. Ramsay sighted along the barrel.

The shot crashed upon the hateful night, echoing from the side of the mountain to the valley and back again, silencing the monotony of the chanting voice. All motion in the pit ceased; all attention was fixed with incredulity upon the figure of the man within the circle of candlelight.

For a moment he stood there, staggering a little upon his feet. Then a dreadful metamorphosis began to take place—a transmutation too fearful for the eyes of man to witness. Ramsay hid his face against the damp earth, his ears tortured by the shrieking of voices and the trample of flying feet. When he dared to gaze once more into the pit below, he could see the flicker of three dying candles and the stained white robes of Linda, his wife.

Cautiously he slipped down the steep slide of earth and lifted the unconscious girl in his arms. As he did so a candle sputtered out, and in the light of the remaining two, stuck upright in the ground, he saw again the horror of that torn thing upon the slab of the sacrifice block. He pressed Linda tightly in his arms and went round the object, only to thrust one foot into a moldering obscenity that crawled below the block. He drew back with a stifled cry and in the dying candlelight he glimpsed two flat, greenish eyes that shimmered faintly from an ooze of gray and jelly-like matter.

Somehow he fled back to the fog-filled world above the pit. Somehow, with Linda in his arms, he stumbled along the mountainside—past the black outline of the building, with its gaping, lamplit doorway, back to the car and the road.

Linda lay against the seat, pale to her very lips, but conscious

now. As the familiar jolting along the mountainside began again, she began to talk very softly, half to herself.

"She was my sister—my twin. She knew because of the mark. Before she died she told me—everything. We were dedicated when we were born. Dedicated to—*that!* But because our mother was good, she tried to get us away from Loon Mountain. Myself they never found, but *he* caught my sister and brought her back. She didn't know what he was—no one knew—only that he was something evil that had crept up from some dark place in the earth.

"But my sister was not obedient to the cult. In her heart she was good, like our mother who had died because of her goodness. And in the end my sister died too. They could afford to fling her over the pit once they had me to take her place."

By some instinct Ramsay kept the car to the road while he listened, until at last the fog thinned and rolled back upon the mountains. Far ahead a hint of gray light crawled up the sky.

Linda sighed and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, the shadow of horror had begun to fade.

"I'm free now," she went on softly. "I couldn't be free before, because he was calling me. Wherever I went, he was there—at the back of my mind—calling."

Against her bare shoulder the faintest tint of rose gave evidence of a mark that was like a tiny inverted cross. Ramsay slipped one arm about her and drew her close to him on the seat.

"Look!" he whispered, "far ahead along the sky. Dawn, my darling!"



INQUISITIONS

Number Seven Queer Street

by Margery Lawrence

Mycroft & Moran: Publishers; Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583; 1969; 236pp; \$4.00.

"Successful psychic detectives," notes the jacket blurb, "do not loom large in the literature of the macabre." And this is entirely true, even though the veteran weird-mystery fan can immediately think of John Silence, Carnacki, Morris Klaw, and Jules de Grandin; the jacket blurb also mentions another whom I have not read, but shall look in to: Dion Fortune's Dr. Tavemer.

In his essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, H. P. Lovecraft gives lesser marks to both Blackwood's John Silence and Hodgson's Carnacki, making the common objection that these characters are both "... a more or less conventional stock figure of the 'infallible' detective type—the progeny of M. Dupin and Sherlock Holmes...moving through scenes and events badly marred by an atmosphere of professional 'occultism'." He does not mention Jules de Grandin, about whom only a few tales in the long series had been published at the time the essay was written, but one can assume that he would find similar fault.

There are two distinct liabilities for the author of psychic or occult detective stories to overcome (1) the "Watson" problem (2) the readers' fundamental

biases and prejudices in respect to psychic events and occultism.

(1) The "Watson" problem is that of presenting our detective without falling into ridiculous adulation, so that he comes out infallible. When you have read all the Sherlock Holmes stories, you realize that, despite his egotism, Holmes does not regard himself as anything like the near-supernatural marvel that Watson does, nor does he prove to be anything like infallible. Nor again, despite his efforts to keep his emotions in a compartment where they will not interfere with his reason, is Holmes quite the emotional zero that almost any particular story might suggest.

William Hope Hodgson gets around the "Watson" problem by having Carnacki his own Watson, relating accounts of his various cases to a circle of friends; he is quite candid in saying that at this point or that, he was decidedly afraid—but I do not recall very much other emotion outside of sympathy for some of the persons involved in the cases. Algernon Blackwood uses the third person approach for some cases—the narrator not being present, while with others the narrator is with Silence all through a case. As I recall, Silence seems considerably more human than Carnacki. Jules de Grandin's cases are all related by his somewhat dense and ever-marvelling (when he isn't scoffing) Dr. Trowbridge, who shows an increasing aptitude for learning nothing from uncanny experience.

(2) As some of the letters I have received from readers indicates, some

persons turn themselves off at the very suggestion that there might be such a thing as psychic science, or a science of occultism; that the weird events related are in line with inexorable law, rather than arbitrary magic which can be anything anyone wants it to be at any time. For such readers, it makes no difference how well a story of this nature is written, as their response is, "Even if it's good I don't like it." Further, unless the reader himself has studied psychic phenomena, as well as legend, etc., and various occult disciplines, he has no chance whatsoever to make any sort of inductions or deductions from the evidence presented, so that such tales (for him) must fall into the category of mystery-suspense stories, on the order of the Fu Manchu series, rather than puzzle-detective stories, where the astute reader has a sporting chance to beat the detective to the solution of the mystery.

Margery Lawrence is an excellent writer who is also well versed in sufficient aspects of occult disciplines, so that the reader who is not emotionally turned off by the subject can appreciate (at least to the point of suspending disbelief) that we are dealing with entirely natural phenomenon (though subject to laws that few understand) rather than arbitrary weird supernaturalism. And Miles Pennoyer, her detective, is not particularly eccentric, nor again a consummate egoist.

Aside from the fact that a catholic priest is required to wear particular clothing at all times (must never go out of uniform as it were), you do not necessarily consider a priest eccentric because you know that he does not eat meat on Fridays or other particular days, and is sworn to celibacy—especially if he is the sort of priest who is not of a proselytizing sort, or who is constantly

talking religion, making moral judgments, etc. And aside from a few practices that Miles Pennoyer follows, without making an issue of them, you would not find him odd or eccentric or queer if you met him and talked to him, there being no occasion for his vocation to be mentioned or discussed. You would find him a sensitive and cultured person, one who projected considerable warmth of personality, but not so much so as to give you an uncomfortable feeling.

This puts him at once above the general level of eccentric detective characters.

Miss Lawrence scores again with the "Watson" problem. There are five tales in this collection: *The Case of the Bronze Door*, *The Case of the Haunted Cathedral*, *The Case of Ella McLeod*, *The Case of the White Snake*, and *The Case of the Moonchild*. The first four are told to the narrator by Pennoyer; in the final one (the most powerful of the lot), the narrator joins Pennoyer and shares the experience with him. Jerry Latimer is not entirely ignorant of some of the fundamentals of occultism; he is not a scoffer—and thus he is not of the Trowbridge type. He is able to give genuinely valuable assistance, and is not baffled by every strange thing he sees and hears. This eliminates any possibilities for the sort of comic relief that the "poor stupid Watson" character provides in more conventional tales of this caliber (though, as I recall, John Silence's friend is no imbecile in *The Nemesis of Fire*); but such sort of comic relief was something I began to find irritating after having read a few tales of this sort, and it certainly puts a story or series on a lower literary level.

Miss Lawrence's approach also eliminates the necessity for large dollops of action and fearsome peril, just for the sake of keeping things going and keeping

the reader easily in breathtaking suspense. There is suspense in these stories, and truly fearsome peril in one, but it is not of the slam-bang action variety; the suspense comes mostly through emotional involvement with the characters' situations and the possibility of feeling sympathy and horror at spiritual dangers even if one may not accept such things outside of fiction.

I cannot say that the reader who has an emotional block against "psychic" or "occult" science will enjoy these stories; for such a block requires that these subjects, if treated at all, should be made to appear ridiculous, neurotic, positively insane, etc. Therefore, such a person will object even more strongly to well-written, sound, and moving stories like these than to the comic strip or action-pulp approach. It is much like the

extreme moralist's outlook upon an unmarried couple who are leading happy and useful lives; he is furious and even more condemnatory of them than of others who are manifestly unhappy and generally loused up—because the unhappy cases confirm his doctrine that unmarried love is necessarily degrading, while the others refute it.

For all others than those with extreme objections to psychic or occult material presented in a "scientific" manner, through stories that are believable and on a high level of writing, this collection from Mycroft and Moran is heartily recommended. Frank Utpatel's jacket is very attractive, and the book conforms to the high production standards that Mycroft & Moran shares with Arkham House. RAWL



THE SCIENCE FICTIONAL SHERLOCK HOLMES

Abal Books, P.O. Box 314, Denver,
Colorado 80201; 1960; 137pp; \$4.00.

Contents: *Sherlock Holmes and Science Fiction* (an introduction), by Anthony Boucher; *The Martian Crown Jewels*, by Poul Anderson; *Half a Hoka*, (an appreciation of Poul Anderson), by Gordon R. Dickson; *The Adventure of the Misplaced Hound*, by Poul Anderson and Gordon R. Dickson; *The Anamoly of the Empty Man*, by Anthony Boucher; *The Greatest Tertian*, by Anthony Boucher; *The Adventure of the Snitch in Time*, and *The Adventure of the Ball of Nostradamus*, by Mack Reynolds and August Derleith; *The Return*, by H. Beam Piper and John J. McGuire.

A pastiche of someone else's character or characters may either use them by name, or (more often the case) use their characteristics very deliberately to such an extent that the reader who knows the original will see the connection at once. Pastiche may be burlesques, spoofs, or works of sincere appreciation.

This collection is for Sherlockians who are also fond of science fiction; Anthony Boucher's opening article lays it out clearly enough.

The Martian Crown Jewels, is an appreciation pastiche, where an alien being, native of Mars, who is familiar with Earth's culture, admires Holmes and is himself a consulting detective.

The Adventure of the Misplaced Hound is a spoof, and part of the Hoka series. Here the Hokas are imitating not only Holmes, Watson, Lestrade, etc. but

(turn to page 128)

THE MAN WHO COLLECTED EYES

by Eddy C. Bertin

CLAES PERQUOI HAD ALWAYS BEEN extremely interested in eyes. Already in his youth, when he used to live in the house next to my parents', he could spend hours just standing before a mirror, or outside bent over a small stream, making silly faces to his own reflection, watching, no, *studying* his own eyes.

This mania—because I can hardly name it otherwise—was created very early in his life by his parents, notwithstanding their good intentions. Parents *all* have only the best of intentions concerning their offspring. Being very Catholic, they had decorated the children's room in the best possible way to their rather narrow minds. On the wall, opposite of the little child's bed, they had hung one of those prints, still often encountered in older farm houses, featuring in burning colors a large triangle, an enormous eye, within the midst, looking down on anyone unfortunate enough to be in the room. Above the eye, which was supposed to have a kind and benevolent look, in red letters of

Claes Perquoi collected eyes the way another man would collect stamps — or butterflies. But his most treasured exhibit was one he could not show . . .

flame, the painting said "*God Sees You*". One could not escape the eye; it saw everything, and specially the young occupant of the room.

It can be called typical for the young Claes' character, that the eye had exactly the opposite reaction on him that it would have had on any normal human being. Instead of beginning to fear the omnipresent eye, he got rather attached and interested in it. Instead of starting to hate its influence, he started to love it. After that, one thing led to the others, and I could rightfully say "One eye led to the others" in this case. His own eyes were the first to receive his fullest attention. Before the mirror, he turned his eyeballs in all directions, an art he mastered very quickly, so that soon only the white stayed visible and the small red veins, like a blank piece of paper with smears of red ink on it. Sometimes when he was turning his eyes, I was afraid that one day they'd escape from their orbits and roll over the floor like large bloody marbles, or just burst open like fallen eggs.

At the age of fourteen, Claes started studying girls' eyes with an even more fixed attention than before. This time not before mirrors, but on small shaded benches in parks, and on the back seats of theaters and other quiet places, where it was in fact a bit too dark to see really much of their eyes. He didn't find what he was looking for anyway, because ten years later, he was still a bachelor. Maybe the girls he dated just wanted something more besides a monologue about the qualities, faults or purity of their eyes.

It was after those first ten years, that he started his collection. He hated it when somebody called his innocent hobby "horrible" or "morbid". "The eye," he preferred to reply to accusations of that kind, "is the most beautiful thing of creation. One should look at the iris as upon a diamond, full of sparkling life, a moving black expression with colored dots around it like a crown of pearls. The pupil is a star, a heart, the brain of the eye, the inner mirror of the soul. The white should be approached like a lake of pure milk, an anti-galaxy of snow purity, in which the pupil drifts like an island in space, a miniature planetoid. The little, almost invisible strings of slime are small clouds, the little arteries

as undersea volcanoes, full of burning fire, veins of pulsating life force, blood!"

He started indeed rather innocently with eyes of dead birds, dogs, cats and even fish, all of which he kept as a real treasure. Big and small eyes, in all colors, which he cut out of the bodies of dead animals, and treated with a special recipe—a magical recipe, he used to joke—so they didn't get slimy and rot away. His living room began to fill, with the results of his collection. Eyes in glass cases, like flowers on the cupboards; other eyes swimming in aquariums like lazy fish, trailing their nerves slowly behind as tails; eyes in hermetically closed terrariums, sunning themselves as tortoises. He had a pair of sparkling lizard eyes made into a pair of cuff-links, and a parrot's eye fixed into a tie-pin.

Great details of reproductions of famous paintings decorated the walls of his house; one eye of the Mona Lisa, a distorted eye from a blue Picasso creation, the eye of the *Head with Lizard* from Paul Klee, a few demonical eyes from the works of Hieronymus Bosch.

One day, he took me secretly to his study room, and opened a hidden safe. He took a small glass case from it, treating it as he would the Crown Jewels, and showed the two black points in it to me. Two very small eyes, black as ink, locked forever in a solution which one could see through, although it had hardened as stone to the touch. They looked like two fossilised insects in a block of resin. "A snake's eyes," he whispered almost reverently, "from a cobra. Noticed their expression? The cruel pain, the blind hatred? They were cut out while the beast was still alive, just after they had skinned her."

I had to stop myself from retching. Casually, I had gotten used to his abominable collection of horrors, so far even that they didn't touch me at all. But vivisection, cold-blooded sadism perpetrated on a helpless animal, which was more than my stomach could stand.

I gave it straight to him. He seemed hurt. "But I didn't know," he defended himself rather weakly. "They only told it afterwards, after I had bought and paid them, almost like a kind

of picturesque detail. Surely, you don't believe *me* being able to really cut a living beast apart, do you? No, you know me better than that. But wait, there's something you just *have* to see. Something *really* special, and they arrived only this very morning."

He reached deeper into the safe, and I heard the clicking sounds of a second lock being opened by the blind touch of his fingers. He took a second box out of it, also locked. Like tentacles, his fingers crawled into his pockets, from which he took a bunch of small keys. He had to use two different ones to open the box, almost making a ceremony from it. With eyes, small of greedy expectation, he looked up at me, and then pushed the contents of the small box under my nose.

Eternally staring into unseeing emptiness, a pair of light blue human eyes looked up at me.

"Paid for very expensively," he whispered, "straight from the morgue. Aren't they beautiful?"

That was the last time I entered his house, before . . . but let me tell the story chronologically. I simply had enough of his mania. We didn't become enemies; there was just a coolness between us and we didn't meet each other regularly any more, except in clubs or as passers by on the street. But never again did I accompany him to his house, or invite him in for a glass of cognac at my apartment.

Just because I didn't see him so often any more, I noticed the change in him sooner than most people who knew him. Something was plaguing him, and it wasn't very difficult to find out what was the exact cause of his unrest. It was completeness, the death stroke to every fanatic collector. Collecting becomes a mania by itself, and when there's nothing any more to collect, interest fails. Claes had arrived at a dead point, and couldn't even hope to add another curious and rare specimen to his treasury. What indeed could be more rare and costly than a pair of human eyes? He became moody, was irritated by the slightest remark; he retired in his shell like a snail, hiding himself and his weird collection from the world.

And then, suddenly, a new metamorphosis came over him, changing him back to his old usual self. He started searching out company again, reappeared on private parties, started coming back at club evenings. He was like a reborn man, but the origin of that mysterious rebirth stayed hidden in secrecy. He never mentioned it openly, except the few times when he would whisper half jokingly about an enormous experiment in black magic, but he refused to give any details.

From a friend, an antiquarian, I learned that he spent masses of money on old and expensive volumes on magic and sorcery. During his vacations he went to London and Paris, visiting specialised dealers in the very rare and searched for books of the occult. He sought out well-known genuine mediums and serious students of the "old sciences"; he even attended a few seances. A few times he got me so curious that I asked him straight away whatever he had in mind. He just laughed, and "One day *you* will know, and *I* will see," became his stock answer on such occasions.

Then complaints started filtering in. His neighbors didn't appreciate the odd smells which sometimes came drifting from the cellar of his house. They also didn't like being kept awake by his weird chanting at the unluckiest hours of the night. Stray dogs and alley cats mysteriously started disappearing in the neighborhood.

But that period didn't last very long, because one night, early in fall, he burst screaming from his house and ran through the empty streets, tried to climb a tree; and when he didn't succeed, he tried to dig himself into the very street stones, hiding under fallen leaves. He screamed the whole neighborhood awake, crawled on his belly like a large black reptile. This impression was mainly due to the black coat he wore, full of strange and weirdly woven designs of astrological origin, and some others I've never seen before. A hospital car came, with four strong men in white jackets, but they also needed the help of two policemen to get him inside.

After a month, in which they analysed and psychically vivisected him, they gave up and sent him to a state asylum,

where he still is confined. He is very inoffensive; in fact, and he likes nothing better than just sitting in his easy chair. He eats, drinks, goes to the toilet and sleeps; sometimes he is even capable of a few simple words.

But wherever he goes, in the garden in summer, or in the white corridors of the home in winter, by day or by night, always he carries his dark glasses. At first they tried to take them away, but he got so violent they had to let him keep them. But they have replaced the original ones by plastic ones, so he is unable to hurt himself by breaking them.

Now I know what destroyed his mind, what sent him screaming up the road like a lunatic. At first I assumed that he had brought madness upon himself (his mind was never very stable, and his dabbling in the occult sciences and magic formulas certainly didn't help), until quite accidentally I found out the truth. God knows, sometimes I wish I had never known. My nights would be more peaceful. Now, whenever I stare into a mirror, I sometimes seem like an alien creature from another sky to myself. When I look up to the night sky, the stars look down upon me like a thousand hostile eyes. We are so small, so incredibly small and unimportant in this universe, a dust particle, a microbe, which can be crushed under one fingernail . . . and there is so very much we don't know. Maybe there *are* worlds besides ours, only separated by a small layer of reality, worlds peopled like ours, only not with human beings.

However Claes succeeded in completing his collection with the missing item, that's something we'll never know. I found out when they emptied his house, and burned his macabre collection on authority's orders. As I was still looked upon as his best (and practically only, I found out) personal friend, and he had no relatives left, I had agreed to be present at the burning; in fact, I threw some ingredients, which I'd rather not mention in detail, into the purifying fire, after we had taken them from the locked safe.

It was then that I found the painting back, and the hole in it, the circular hole into nothing. A dark emptiness in which I

thought I saw stars sparkle, and in which enormous shadow forms seemed to move and approach. At that moment, I understood which eye Claes had wanted to add to his collection. As soon as I touched the plate, I felt the weird suction from the hole, a slimy tearing movement, and I felt the almost irresistible compulsion—I *had* to look down into the hole, down in its depths and upon the face of whatever lurked down there.

Then I hurled the cursed thing into the flames. There was an enormous rain of fire sparks, a mass of green-blue fire curling in fat tongues upwards, accompanied by a hissing and crackling sound and a strange far-away wailing sound. The flames lowered and a disgusting soft-sweet smell started spreading. I ran away, still unable to understand fully what I had witnessed and almost seen, only knowing with dead certainty that I had destroyed something which didn't belong to this world, something which should never have existed in it.

It had been the big painting, which had hung above his bed in his youth, the plate with the triangle and the eye in it, and the flame letters "*God Sees You*".

But only the triangle and the letters were still there; the rest had been empty, the enormous black hole into nothing, as if there had never been anything there which had looked down on the world.



THE DEVIL'S ROSARY

by Seabury Quinn

(author of *The Man Who Cast No Shadow*, *Ancient Fires*, etc.)

MY FRIEND JULES DE GRANDIN was in a seasonably sentimental mood. "It is the springtime, Friend Trowbridge," he reminded as we walked down Tonawanda Avenue, that day in 1928. "The horse-chestnuts are in bloom and the blackbirds whistle among the branches at St. Cloud; the tables are once more set before the cafes, and—*grand Dieu, la belle creature!*" He cut short his remarks to stare in undisguised admiration at a girl about to enter an old-fashioned horse-drawn victoria at the curb.

Embarrassed, I plucked him by the elbow, intent on drawing him onward, but he snatched his arm away and bounded forward with a cry, even as my fingers touched his sleeve. "Attend her, my friend," he called; "she faints!"

As she seated herself on the taupe cushions of her carriage, the

How could something smaller than a hazel-nut,
smooth as ivory, and stained a brilliant red be a thing
of stark terror?

girl reached inside her silver mesh bag, evidently in search of a handkerchief, fumbled a moment among the miscellany of feminine fripperies inside the reticule, then wilted forward as though bludgeoned.

"*Mademoiselle*, you are ill, you are in trouble, you must let us help you!" de Grandin exclaimed as he mounted the vehicle's step. "We are physicians," he added in belated explanation as the elderly coachman turned and favored us with a hostile stare.

The girl was plainly fighting hard for consciousness. Her face had gone death-gray beneath its film of delicate make-up, and her lips trembled and quavered like those of a child about to weep, but she made a brave effort at composure. "I—I'm—all—right—thank—you," she murmured disjointedly. "It's—just—the—heat——" Her protest died half uttered and her eyelids fluttered down as her head fell forward on de Grandin's ready shoulder.

"*Morbleu*, she *has* swooned!" the little Frenchman whispered. "To Dr. Trowbridge's house—993 Susquehanna Avenue!" he called authoritatively to the coachman. "*Mademoiselle* is indisposed." Turning to the girl he busied himself making her as comfortable as possible as the rubber-tired vehicle rolled smoothly over the asphalt roadway.

She was, as de Grandin had said, a "*belle creature*." From the top of her velour hat to the pointed tips of her suede pumps she was all in gray, a platinum fox scarf complementing the soft, clinging stuff of her costume, a tiny bouquet of early-spring violets lending the sole touch of color to her ensemble. A single tendril of daffodil-yellow hair escaped from beneath the margin of her close-fitting hat lay across a cheek as creamy-smooth and delicate as a babe's.

"Gently, my friend," de Grandin bade as the carriage stopped before my door. "Take her arm—so. Now, we shall soon have her recovered."

In the surgery he assisted the girl to a chair and mixed a strong dose of aromatic ammonia, then held it to the patient's blanched lips.

"Ah—so, she revives," he commented in a satisfied voice as the delicate, violet-veined lids fluttered uncertainly a moment, then rose slowly, unveiling a pair of wide, frightened purple eyes.

"Oh——" the girl began in a sort of choked whisper, half rising from her seat, but de Grandin put a hand gently on her shoulder and forced her back.

"Make haste slowly, *ma belle petite*," he counseled. "You are still weak from shock and it is not well to tax your strength. If you will be so good as to drink this—" He extended the glass of ammonia toward her with a bow, but she seemed not to see it. Instead, she stared about the room with a dazed, panic-stricken look, her lips trembling, her whole body quaking in a perfect agony of unreasoning terror. Somehow, as I watched, I was reminded of a spectacle I had once witnessed at the zoo when Rajah, a thirty-foot Indian python, had refused food, and the curators, rather than lose a valuable reptile by starvation, overrode their compunctions and thrust a poor, helpless white rabbit into the monster's glass-walled den.

"I've seen it; I've seen it; *I've seen it!*" She chanted the litany of terror, each repetition higher, more intense, nearer the boundary of hysteria than the one before.

"*Mademoiselle!*" de Grandin's peremptory tone cut her terrified iteration short. "You will please not repeat meaningless nothings to yourself while we stand here like a pair of stone monkeys. What is it you have seen, if you please?"

The unemotional, icy monotone in which he spoke brought the girl from her near-hysteria as a sudden dash of cold water in the face might have done. "This!" she cried in a sort of frenzied desperation as she thrust her hand into the mesh bag pendent from her wrist. For a moment she ransacked its interior with groping fingers; then, gingerly, as though she held something live and venomous, brought forth a tiny object and extended it to him.

"U'm?" he murmured non-committally, taking the thing from her and holding it up to the light as though it were an oddity of nature.

It was somewhat smaller than a hazel-nut, smooth as ivory,

and stained a brilliant red. Through its axis was bored a hole, evidently for the purpose of accommodating a cord. Obviously, it was one of a strand of inexpensive beads, though I was at a loss to say of what material it was made. In any event, I could see nothing about the commonplace little trinket to warrant such evident terror as our patient displayed.

Jules de Grandin was apparently struck by the incongruity of cause and effect, too, for he glanced from the little red globule to the girl, then back again, and his narrow, dark eyebrows raised interrogatively. At length: "I do not think I apprehend the connection," he confessed. "This"—he tapped the tiny ball with a well manicured forefinger—"may have deep significance to you, *Mademoiselle*, but to me it appears—"

"Significance?" the girl echoed. "It has! When my mother was drowned in Paris, a ball like this was found clutched in her hand. When my brother died in London, we found one on the counterpane of his bed. Last summer my sister was drowned while swimming at Atlantic Highlands. When they recovered the body, they found one of these terrible beads hidden in her bathing-cap!" She broke off with a retching sob and rested her arm on the surgery table, pillowing her face on it and surrendering herself to a paroxysm of weeping.

"Oh, I'm doomed," she wailed between blanching lips. "There's no help for me, and—I'm too young; I don't want to die!"

"Few people do, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin remarked dryly. "However, I see no cause of immediate despair. Over an hour has passed since you discovered this evil talisman, and you still live. So much for the past. For the future you may trust in the mercy of heaven and the cleverness of Jules de Grandin. Meantime, if you are sufficiently recovered, we shall do ourselves the honor of escorting you home."

Under de Grandin's adroit questioning we learned much of the girl's story during our homeward drive. She was Haroldine Arkright, daughter of James Arkright, a wealthy widower who had lately moved to Harrisonville and leased the Broussard

mansion in the fashionable west end. Though only nineteen years old, she had spent so much time abroad that America was more foreign to her than France, Spain or England.

Born in Waterbury, Connecticut, she had lived there during her first twelve years, and her family had been somewhat less than moderately well-to-do. Her father was an engineer, and spent much time abroad. Occasionally, when his remittances were delayed, the family felt the pinch of undisguised poverty. One day her father returned home unexpectedly, apparently in a state of great agitation. There had been mysterious whisperings, much furtive going and coming; then the family entrained for Boston, going immediately to the Hoosac Tunnel Docks and taking ship for Europe.

She and her sister were put to school in a convent at Rheims, and though they had frequent and affectionate letters from their parents, the communications came from different places each time; so she had the impression her elders led a Bedouin existence.

At the outbreak of the war the girls were taken to a Spanish seminary, where they remained until two years before, when they joined their parents in Paris.

"We'd lived there only a little while," she continued, "when two gendarmes came to our apartment one afternoon and asked for Daddy. One of them whispered something to him and he turned white as a sheet; then, when the other took something from his pocket and showed it, Daddy fell over in a dead faint. It wasn't till several hours later that we children were told. Mother's body had been found floating in the Seine, and one of those horrible little red balls was in her hand. That was the first we ever heard of them.

"Though Daddy was terribly affected by the tragedy, there was something we couldn't understand about his actions. As soon as the *Pompes Funebres* (the municipal undertakers) had conducted the services, he made arrangements with a solicitor to sell all our furniture and we moved to London without stopping to pack anything but a few clothes and toilet articles.

"In London we took a little cottage out by Garden City, and

we lived—it seemed to me—almost in hiding; but before we'd lived there a year my brother Philip died, and—they found the second of these red beads lying on the cover of his bed.

"Father seemed almost beside himself when Phil died. We left—fled would be a better word—just as we had gone from Paris, without stopping to pack a thing but our clothes. When we arrived in America we lived in a little hotel in downtown New York for a while, then moved to Harrisonville and rented this house furnished.

"Last summer Charlotte went down to the Highlands with a party of friends, and—" she paused again, and de Grandin nodded understandingly.

"Has *Monsieur* your father ever taken you into his confidence?" he asked at length. "Has he, by any chance, told you the origin of these so mysterious little red pellets and—"

"Not till Charlotte drowned," she cut in. "After that he told me that if I ever saw such a ball anywhere—whether worn as an ornament by some person, or among my things, or even lying in the street—I was to come to him at once."

"U'm?" he nodded gravely. "And have you, perhaps, some idea how this might have come into your purse?"

"No. I'm sure it wasn't there when I left home this morning, and it wasn't there when I opened my bag to put my change in after making my purchases at Braunstein's, either. The first I saw of it was when I felt for a handkerchief after getting into the carriage, and—oh, I'm terribly afraid, Dr. de Grandin. I'm too young to die! It's not fair; I'm only nineteen, and I was to have been married this June and—"

"Softly, *ma chere*," he soothed. "Do not distress yourself unnecessarily. Remember, I am with you."

"But what can you do?" she demanded. "I tell you, when one of these beads appears anywhere about a member of our family, it's too late for—"

"*Mademoiselle*," he interrupted, "it is never too late for Jules de Grandin—if he be called in time. In your case we have—" His words were drowned by a sudden angry roar as a sheet of vivid

lightning tore across the sky, followed by the bellow of a deafening crash of thunder.

"*Parbleu*, we shall be drenched!" de Grandin cried, eyeing the cloud-hung heavens apprehensively. "Quick, Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, assist Mademoiselle Haroldine to alight. I think we would better hail a taxi and permit the coachman to return alone with the carriage.

"One moment, if you please, *Mademoiselle*," he ordered as the girl took my outstretched hand; "that little red ball which you did so unaccountably find in your purse, you will let me have it—a little wetting will make it none the less interesting to your father." Without so much as a word of apology, he opened the girl's bag, extracted the sinister red globule and deposited it between the cushions of the carriage seat, then, with the coachman's aid, proceeded to raise the vehicle's collache top.

As the covered carriage rolled rapidly away, he raised his hand, halting a taxicab, and calling sharply to the chauffeur: "Make haste, my friend. Should you arrive at our destination before the storm breaks, there is in my pocket an extra dollar for you."

The driver earned his fee with compound interest, for it seemed to me we transgressed every traffic ordinance on the books in the course of our ride, cutting corners on two wheels, racing madly in the wrong direction through one-way streets, taking more than one chance of fatal collision with passing vehicles.

The floodgates of the clouds were just opening, and great torrents of water were cataracting down when we drew up beneath the Arkright porte-cochere and de Grandin handed Haroldine from the cab with a ceremonious bow, then turned to pay the taxi-man his well-earned bonus.

"*Mordieu*, our luck holds excellently well—" he began as we turned toward the door, but a blaze of lightning more savage than any we had seen thus far and the roaring detonation of a thunderclap which seemed fairly to split the heavens blotted out the remainder of his sentence.

The girl shrank against me with a frightened little cry as the

lightning seared our eyes, and I sympathized with her terror, for it seemed to me the flash must have struck almost at our feet, so nearly simultaneous were fire and thunder, but a wild, half-hysterical laugh from de Grandin brought me round with an astonished exclamation.

The little Frenchman had rushed from the shelter of the mansion's porch and pointed dramatically toward the big stone pillars flanking the entrance to the grounds. There, toppled on its side as though struck fairly by a high-explosive shell, lay the victoria we had ordered to follow us, the horses kicking wildly at their shattered harness, the coachman thrown a clear dozen feet from his vehicle, and the carriage itself reduced to splinters scarcely larger than match-staves.

Heedless of the drenching rain, we raced across the lawn and halted by the prostrate postilion. Miraculously, the man was not only living, but regaining consciousness as we reached him. "Glory be to God!" he exclaimed piously as we helped him to his feet. "'Tis only by th' mercy o' heaven I'm still a livin' man!"

"*Eh bien*, my friend"—de Grandin gave his little blond mustache a sharp twist as he surveyed the ruined carriage—"perhapsly the stupidity of hell may have something to do with it. Look to your horses; they seem scarcely worse off than yourself, but they may be up to mischief if they remain unchaperoned."

Once more beneath the shelter of the porte-cochere, as calmly as though discussing the probability of the storm's abatement, he proposed: "Let us go in, my friends. The horses and coachman will soon be all right. As for the carriage"—he raised his narrow shoulders in a fatalistic shrug—"Mademoiselle, I hope *Monsieur* your father carried adequate insurance on it."

2

THE LITTLE FRENCHMAN laid his hand on the polished brass handle of the big oak door, but the portal held its place unyieldingly, and it was not till the girl had pressed the bell button several times that a butler who looked as if his early

training had been acquired while serving as guard in a penitentiary appeared and paid us the compliment of a searching inspection before standing aside to admit us.

"Your father's in the living-room, Miss Haroldine," he answered the girl's quick question, then followed us half-way down the hall, as though reluctant to let us out of sight.

Heavy draperies of mulberry and gold brocade were drawn across the living-room windows, shutting out the lightning flashes and muffling the rumble of the thunder. A fire of resined logs burned cheerfully in the marble-arched fireplace, taking the edge from the early-spring chill; electric lamps under painted shades spilled pools of light on Turkey carpets, mahogany shelves loaded with ranks of morocco-bound volumes and the blurred blues, reds and purples of Oriental porcelains. On the walls the dwarfed perfection of several beautifully executed miniatures showed, and in the far corner of the apartment loomed the magnificence of a massive grand piano.

James Arkright leaped from the overstuffed armchair in which he had been lounging before the fire and whirled to face us as we entered the room, almost, it seemed to me, as though he were expecting an attack. He was a middle-aged man, slender almost to the point of emaciation, with an oddly parchmentlike skin and a long, gaunt face rendered longer by the iron-gray imperial pendant from his chin. His nose was thin and high-bridged, like the beak of a predatory bird, and his ears queer, Panesque appendages, giving his face an odd, impish look. But it was his eyes which riveted our attention most of all. They were of an indeterminate color, neither gray nor hazel, but somewhere between, and darted continually here and there, keeping us constantly in view, yet seeming to watch every corner of the room at the same time. For a moment, as we trooped into the room, he surveyed us in turn with that strange, roving glance, a light of inquiring uncertainty in his eyes fading to a temporary relief as his daughter presented us.

As he resumed his seat before the fire the skirt of his jacket flicked back and I caught a fleeting glimpse of the corrugated stock of a heavy revolver holstered to his belt.

The customary courtesies having been exchanged we lapsed into a silence which stretched and lengthened until I began to feel like a bashful lad seeking an excuse for bidding his sweetheart adieu. I cleared my throat, preparatory to making some insane remark concerning the sudden storm, but de Grandin forestalled me.

"*Monsieur*," he asked as his direct, unwinking stare bored straight into Arkright's oddly watchful eyes, "when was it you were in Tibet, if you please?"

The effect was electric. Our host bounded from his chair as though propelled by an uncoiled spring, and for once his eyes ceased to rove as he regarded the little Frenchman with a gaze of mixed incredulity and horror. His hand slipped beneath his jacket to the butt of the concealed weapon, but:

"Violence is unnecessary, my friend," de Grandin assured him coolly. "We are come to help you, if possible, and besides I have you covered"—he glanced momentarily at the bulge in his jacket pocket where the muzzle of his tiny Ortgies automatic pressed against the cloth—"and it would be but an instant's work to kill you several times before you could reach your pistol. Very good"—he gave one of his quick, elfish smiles as the other subsided into his chair—"we do make progress.

"You wonder, perhaps, how comes it I ask that question? Very well. A half-hour or so ago, when *Mademoiselle* your lovely daughter was recovered from her fainting-spell in Dr. Trowbridge's office, she tells us of the sinister red bead she has found in her purse, and of the evil fortune such little balls have been connected with in the past.

"I, *Monsieur*, have traveled a very great much. In darkest Africa, in innermost Asia, where few white men have gone and lived to boast of it, I have been there. Among the head-hunters of Papua, beside the upper banks of the Amazon, Jules de Grandin has been. *Alors*, is it so strange that I recognize this so mysterious ball for what it is? *Parbleu*, in disguise I have fingered many such in the lamaseries of Tibet!

"*Mademoiselle's* story, it tells me much; but there is much

more I would learn from you if I am to be of service. You were once poor. That is no disgrace. You suddenly became rich; that also is no disgrace, nor is the fact that you traveled up and down the world almost constantly after the acquisition of your fortune necessarily confession of wrongdoing. But"—he fixed his eyes challengingly on our host—"but what of the other occurrences? How comes it that *Madame* your wife (God rest her spirit!) was found floating in the Seine with such a red ball clutched in her poor, dead hand?

"Me, I have recognized this ball. It is a bead from the rosary of a Buddhist lama of that devil-ridden gable of the world we call Tibet. How came *Madame* to be grasping it? Who knows?

"When next we see one of these red beads, it is on the occasion of the sudden sad death of the young *Monsieur*, your son.

"Later, when you have fled like one pursued to America and settled in this small city which nestles in the shadow of the great New York, comes the death of your daughter, Mademoiselle Charlotte—and once more the red ball appears.

"This afternoon Mademoiselle Haroldine finds the talisman of impending doom in her purse and forthwith swoons in terror. Dr. Trowbridge and I succor her and are conveying her to you when a storm arises out of a clear sky. We change vehicles and I leave the red bead behind. All goes well until—*pouf!*—a bolt of lightning strikes the carriage in which the holder of this devil's rosary seems to ride, and demolishes it. But horses and coachman are spared. *Cordieu*, it is more than merely strange; it is surprizing, it is amazing, it is astonishing! One who does not know what Jules de Grandin knows would think it incomprehensible.

"It is not so. I know what I have seen. In Tibet I have seen those masked devil-dancers cause the rain to fall and the winds to blow and the lightning bolts to strike where they willed. They are worshipers of the demons of the air, my friends, and it was not for nothing the wise old Hebrews named Satan, the rejected of God, the Prince of the Powers of the Air. No.

"Very well. We have here so many elements that we need scarcely guess to know what the answer is. *Monsieur* Arkright, as the roast follows the fish and coffee and cognac follow both, it follows that you once wrested from the lamas of Tibet some secret they wished kept; that by that secret you did obtain much wealth; and that in revenge those old heathen monks of the mountains follow you and yours with implacable hatred. Each time they strike, it would appear, they leave one of these beads from the red rosary of vengeance as sign and seal of their accomplished purpose. Am I not right?" He looked expectantly at our host a moment; then, with a gestured application for permission from Haroldine, produced a French cigarette, set it alight and inhaled its acrid, ill-flavored smoke with gusto.

James Arkright regarded the little Frenchman as a respectable matron might look at the blackmailer threatening to disclose an indiscretion of her youth. With a deep, shuddering sigh he slumped forward in his chair like a man from whom all the resistance has been squeezed with a single titanic pressure. "You're right, Dr. de Grandin," he admitted in a toneless voice, and his eyes no longer seemed to take inventory of everything about him. "I *was* in Tibet; it was there I stole the *Pi Yu* Stone—would God I'd never seen the damned thing!"

"Ah?" murmured de Grandin, emitting a twin column of mordant smoke from his narrow nostrils. "We make progress. Say on, *Monsieur*; I listen with ears like the rabbit's. This *Pi Yu* Stone, it is what?"

Something like diffidence showed in Arkright's face as he replied, "You won't believe me, when I've told you."

De Grandin emitted a final puff of smoke and ground the fire from his cigarette against the bottom of a cloisonne bowl. "*Eh bien, Monsieur*," he answered with an impatient shrug, "it is not the wondrous things men refuse to credit. Tell the ordinary citizen that Mars is sixty million miles from Earth, and he believes you without question. Hang up a sign informing him that a fence is newly painted, and he must needs smear his finger to prove your veracity. Proceed, if you please."

"I was born in Waterbury," Arkright began in a sort of

half-fearful, half-stubborn monotone, "and educated as an engineer. My father was a Congregational clergyman, and money was none too plentiful with us; so, when I completed my course at Sheff, I took the first job that was offered. They don't pay any too princely salaries to cubs just out of school, you know and the very necessity of my finding employment right away kept me from making a decent bargain for myself.

"For ten years I sweated for the N.Y., N.H. & H., watching most of my classmates pass me by as though I stood stone-still. Finally I was fed up; I had a wife and three children, and hardly enough money to feed them, let alone give them the things my classmates' families had. So, when I got an offer from a British house to do some work in the Himalayas it looked about as gorgeous to me as the fairy godmother's gifts did to Cinderella. It would get me away from America and the constant reminders of my failure, at any rate.

"The job took me into upper Nepal and I worked at it for close to three years, earning the customary vacation at last. Instead of going down into India, as most of the men did, I pushed up into Tibet with another chap who was keen on research, and a party of six Bhotia bearers. We had no particular goal in mind, but we'd been so fed up on stories of the weird happenings in those mountain lamaseries, we thought we'd go up and have a look—see on our own.

"There was some good shooting on the way, and what few natives we ran into were harmless enough if you kept 'em far enough away to prevent their cooties from climbing aboard you; so we really didn't get much excitement out of the trip, and had about decided it was a bust when we came on a little lamasery perched like an eagle's nest on the edge of an enormous cliff.

"We managed to scramble up the zigzag path to the place, and had some difficulty getting in, but at last the ta-lama agreed we might spend the night there.

"They didn't seem to take any particular notice of us after we'd unslung our packs in the courtyard, and we had the run of the place pretty much to ourselves. Clendenning, my English

companion, had knocked about Central Asia for upward of twenty years, and spoke several Chinese dialects as well as Tibetan, but for some reason he'd played dumb when we knocked at the gates and let our head man interpret for us.

"About 4 o'clock in the afternoon he came to me in a perfect fever of excitement. 'Arkright, old boy,' he whispered, 'this blighted place is simply filthy with gold—raw, virgin gold!'

" 'You're spoofing,' I told him; 'these poor old duffers are so God-awful poor they'd crawl a mile on their bare knees and elbows for a handful of copper *cash*.'

" 'Cash my hat!' he returned. 'I tell you, they've got great heaps and stacks of gold here; gold enough to make our perishing fortunes ten times over if we could shift to get the blighted stuff away. Come along, I'll show you.'

"He fairly dragged me across the courtyard where our duffle was stored, through a low doorway, and down a passage cut in the solid rock. There wasn't a lama or servant in sight as we made our way through one tunnel after another; I suppose they were so sure we couldn't understand their lingo that they thought it a waste of time to watch us. At any rate, no one offered us any interruption while we clambered down three or four flights of stairs to a sort of cavern which had been artificially enlarged to make a big, vaulted cellar.

"Gentlemen" — Arkright looked from de Grandin to me and back again—"I don't know what it is, but something seems to get into a white man's blood when he goes to the far corners of the world. Men who wouldn't think of stealing a canceled postage stamp at home will loot a Chinese or Indian treasure house clean and never stop to give the moral aspects of their actions a second thought. That's the way it was with Clendenning and me. When we saw those stacks of golden ingots piled up in that cave like firewood around the sides of a New England woodshed, we just went off our heads. Nothing but the fact that the two of us couldn't so much as lift, much less carry, a single one of the bars kept us from making off with the treasure that minute.

"When we saw we couldn't carry any of it off we were almost wild. Scheme after scheme was broached, only to be discarded.

Stealth was no go, for we'd be sure to be seen if we tried to lead our bearers down the tunnels; force was out of the question, for the lamas outnumbered us ten to one, and the ugly-looking knives they wore were sufficient warning to us not to get them roused.

"Finally, when we were almost insane with futile planning, Clendenning suggested, 'Come on, let's get out of this cursed place. If we look around a little we may find a cache of jewels—we wouldn't need a derrick to carry off a couple of Imperial quarts of them, at any rate.'

"The underground passages were like a Cretan labyrinth, and we lost our way more than once while we stumbled around with no light but the flicker of Clendenning's electric torch, but after an hour or more of floundering over the damp, slippery stones of the tunnels, we came to a door stopped with a curtain of yak's hide. A fat, shaven-headed lama was sitting beside it, but he was sound asleep and we didn't trouble to waken him.

"Inside was a fair-sized room, partly hollowed out of the living rock, partly natural grotto. Multicolored flags draped from the low ceiling, each emblazoned with prayers or mottoes in Chinese ideographs or painted with effigies of holy saints or gods and goddesses. Big bands of silk cloth festooned down the walls. On each side of the doorway were prayer wheels ready to be spun, and a plate of beaten gold with the signs of the Chinese zodiac was above the lintel. On both sides of the approach to the altar were low, red-lacquered benches for the lamas and the choir. Small lamps with tiny, flickering flames threw their rays on the gold and silver vessels and candlesticks. At the extreme end of the room, veiling the sanctuary, hung a heavy curtain of yellow silk painted with Tibetan inscriptions.

"While we were standing there, wondering what our next move would be, the shuffle of feet and the faint tinkle of bells came to us. 'Quick,' Clendenning ordered, 'we mustn't be caught here!' He ran to the door, but it was too late, for the monk on guard was already awake, and we could see the faint gleam of light from candles borne in procession at the farther end of the corridor.

"What happened next was the turning-point in our lives, gentlemen. Without stopping to think, apparently, Clendenning acted. Snatching the heavy Browning from his belt he hit the guardian monk a terrific blow over the head, dragged him through the doorway and ripped off his robe. 'Here, Arkright, put this on!' he commanded as he lugged the unconscious man's body into a dark corner of the room and concealed himself behind one of the wall draperies.

"I slipped the yellow gown over my clothes and squatted in front of the nearest prayer wheel, spinning the thing like mad.

"I suppose you've already noticed I've a rather Mongolian cast of features?" he asked with a bleak smile.

"*Nom d'un fusil, Monsieur*, let us not discuss personal pulchritude, or its lack, if you please!" de Grandin exclaimed testily. "Be so good as to advance with your narrative!"

"It wasn't vanity which prompted the question," Arkright replied. "Even with my beard, I'm sometimes taken for a Chinaman or a half-caste. In those days I was clean-shaven, and both Clendenning and I had had our heads shaved for sanitary reasons before setting out on our trip; so, with the lama's robe pulled up about my neck, in the dim light of the sanctuary I passed very well for one of the brotherhood, and not one of the monks in the procession gave me so much as a second glance.

"The ta-lama—I suppose you'd call him the abbot of the community—led the procession into the temple and halted before the sanctuary curtain. Two subordinate lamas pulled the veil aside, and out of the dim light from the flickering lamps there gradually appeared the great golden statue of Buddha seated in the Golden Lotus. The face of the image was indifferent and calm with only the softest gleam of light animating it, yet despite the repose of the bloated features it seemed to me there was something malignant about the countenance.

"Glancing up under my brows as I turned the prayer wheel, I could see the main idol was flanked on each side by dozens of smaller statues, each, apparently, of solid gold.

"The ta-lama struck a great bronze gong with a padded

drumstick to attract the Buddha's attention to his prayer, then closed his eyes, placed his hands together before his face and prayed. As his sleeve fell away, I noticed a rosary of red beads, like those I was later to know with such horror, looped about his left wrist.

"The subordinate lamas all bent their foreheads to the floor while their master prayed standing before the face of Buddha. Finally, the abbot lowered his hands, and his followers rose and gathered at the foot of the altar. He opened a small, ovenlike receptacle beneath the calyx of the Golden Lotus and took from it a little golden image which one of his subordinates placed among the ranks of subsidiary Buddhas to the right of the great idol. Then he replaced the golden statuette with another exactly like it, except fashioned of lead, closed the sliding door to the little cavity and turned from the altar. Then, followed by his company, he marched from the chapel, leaving Clendenning and me in possession.

"It didn't take us more than a minute to rush up those altar steps, swing back the curtain and open the door under the Golden Lotus, you may be sure.

"Inside the door was a compartment about the size of a moderately large gas stove's oven, and in it were the little image we had seen the ta-lama put in and half a dozen bars of lead, iron and copper, each the exact dimensions of the golden ingots we'd seen in the treasure chamber.

"I said the bars were lead, copper and iron, but that's a misstatement. All of them *had* been composed of those metals, *but every one was from a quarter to three-fourths solid gold*. Slowly, as a loaf of bread browns by degrees in a bake-oven, these bars of base metal were being transmuted into solid, virgin gold.

"Clendenning and I looked at each other in dumfounded amazement. We knew it couldn't be possible, yet there it was, before our eyes.

"For a moment Clendenning peered into the alchemist's cabinet, then suddenly gave a low whistle. At the extreme back of the 'oven' was a piece of odd-looking substance about the size

of a child's fist; something like jade, something like amber, yet differing subtly from each. As Clendenning reached his hand into the compartment to indicate it with his finger the diamond setting of a ring he wore suddenly glowed and sparkled as though lit from within by living fire.

"'For Gawd's sake!' he exclaimed. 'D'ye see what it is, Arkright? It's the Philosopher's Stone, or I'm a Dutchman!'"

"The Philosopher's Stone?" I queried, puzzled.

De Grandin made a gesture of impatience, but Arkright's queer, haunted eyes were on me, and he failed to notice the Frenchman's annoyance.

"Yes, Dr. Trowbridge," he replied. "The ancient alchemists thought there was a substance which would convert all base metals into gold by the power of its magical emanations, you know. Nearly all noted magi believed in it, and most of them attempted to make it synthetically. Many of the things we use in everyday life were discovered as by-products while the ancients were seeking to perfect the magic formula. Booticher stumbled on the method of making Dresden porcelain while searching for the treasure; Roger Bacon evolved the composition of gunpowder in the same way; Gerber discovered the properties of acids, Van Helmont secured the first accurate data on the nature of gases and the famous Dr. Glauber discovered the medicinal salts which bear his name in the course of experiments in search of the Stone.

"Oddly enough, the ancients were on the right track all the while, though, of course, they could not know it; for they were wont to refer to the Stone as a substratum—from the Latin *sub* and *stratus*, of course, signifying something spread under—and hundreds of years later scientists actually discovered the uranium oxide we know as pitchblende, the chief source of radium.

"Clendenning must have realized the queer substance in the altar was possessed of remarkable radioactive properties, for instead of attempting to grasp it in his fingers, as I should have done, he seized two of the altar candlesticks, and holding them like a pair of pincers, lifted the thing bodily from its setting;

then, taking great care not to touch it, wrapped and re-wrapped it in thin sheets of gold stripped from the altar ornaments. His data were incomplete, of course, but his reasoning, or perhaps his scientifically trained instinct, was accurate. You see, he inferred that since the 'stone' had the property of transmuting base metals with which it came in near contact into gold, gold would in all probability be the one element impervious to its radioactive rays, and consequently the only effective form of insulation. We had seen the ta-lama and his assistants grasp the little image of Buddha so recently transformed from lead to gold with their bare hands, so felt reasonably sure there would be no danger of radium burns from gold recently in contact with the substance, while there might be grave danger if we used anything but gold as wrappings for it.

"Clendenning was for strangling the lama we had stunned when we saw the procession headed toward the chapel, but I persuaded him to tie and gag the fellow and leave him hidden in the shrine; so when we had finished this we crept through the underground passages to the courtyard where our Bhotias were squatting beside the luggage and ordered them to break camp at once.

"The old ta-lama came to bid us a courteous good-bye and refused our offered payment for our entertainment, and we set off on the trail toward Nepal as if the devil were on our heels. He was, though we didn't know it then.

"Our way was mostly downhill, and everything seemed in our favor. We pushed on long after the sun had set, and by 10 o'clock were well past the third *tach-davan*, or pass, from the lamasery. When we finally made camp Clendenning could hardly wait for our tent to be pitched before experimenting with our loot.

"Unwrapping the strange substance, we noticed that it glowed in the half-light of the tent with a sort of greenish phosphorescence, which made Clendenning christen it *Pi Yu*, which is Chinese for jade, and by that name we knew it thereafter. We put a pair of pistol bullets inside the wrappings, and lay down for a few hours' sleep with the *Pi Yu* between us. At 5 the next morning when we routed out the bearers and

prepared to get under way, the entire leaden portions of the cartridges had been transmuted to gold and the copper powder-jackets were beginning to take on a decided golden glint. Forcing the shells off, we found the powder with which the cartridges were charged had become pure gold dust. This afforded us some valuable data. Lead was transmuted more quickly than copper, and semi-metallic substances like gunpowder were apparently even more susceptible than pure metals, though the powder's granular form might have sped its transmutation.

"We drove the bearers like slave-masters that day, and they were on the point of open mutiny when evening came. Poor devils, if they'd known what lay behind there'd have been little enough need to urge them on.

"Camp had been made and we had all settled down to a sleep of utter exhaustion when I first heard it. Very faint and far away it was, so faint as to be scarcely recognizable, but growing louder each second—the rumbling whistle of a wind of hurricane velocity shrieking and tearing down the passes.

"I kicked Clendenning awake, and together we made for a cleft in the rocks, yelling to our Bhotias to take cover at the same time. The poor devils were too waterlogged with sleep to realize what we shouted, and before we could give a second warning the thing was among them. Demoniacal blasts of wind so fierce we could almost see them shrieked and screamed and howled through the camp, each gust seeming to be aimed with dreadful accuracy. They whirled and twisted and tore about, scattering blazing logs like sparks, from bursting firecrackers, literally tearing our tents into scraps no larger than a man's hand, picking up beasts and men bodily and hurling them against the cliff-walls till they were battered out of all semblance of their original form. Within five minutes our camp was reduced to such hopeless wreckage as may be seen only in the wake of a tornado, and Clendenning and I were the only living things within a radius of five miles.

"We were about to crawl from our hiding-place when

something warned me the danger was not yet past, and I grabbed at Clendenning's arm. He pulled away, but left the musette bag in which the *Pi Yu* was packed in my hand. Next moment he walked to the center of the shambles which had been our camp and began looking around in a dazed sort of way. Almost as he came to a halt, a terrific roar sounded and the entire air seemed to burn with the fury of a bursting lightning-bolt. Clendenning was wiped out as though he had never been—torn literally to dust by the unspeakable force of the lightning, and even the rock where he had stood was scarred and blackened as though water-blasted. But the terrible performance didn't stop there. Bolt after bolt of frightful lightning was hurled down like an accurately aimed barrage till every shred of our men, our yaks, our tents and our camp paraphernalia had not only been milled to dust, but completely obliterated.

"How long the artillery-fire from the sky lasted I do not know. To me; as I crouched in the little cave between the rocks, it seemed hours, years, centuries. Actually, I suppose, it kept up for something like five minutes. I think I must have fainted with the horror of it at the last, for the next thing I knew the sun was shining and the air was clear and icy-cold. No one passing could have told from the keenest observation that anything living had occupied our campsite in years. There was no sign or trace—absolutely none—of human or animal occupancy to be found. Only the cracked and lightning-blackened rocks bore witness to the terrible bombardment which had been laid down.

"I wasted precious hours in searching, but not a shred of cloth or flesh, not a lock of hair or a congealed drop of blood remained of my companions.

"The following days were like a nightmare—one of those awful dreams in which the sleeper is forever fleeing and forever pursued by something unnamably horrible. A dozen times a day I'd hear the skirling tempests rushing down the passes behind and scuttle to the nearest hole in the rocks like a panic-stricken rabbit when the falcon's shadow suddenly appears across its path. Sometimes I'd be storm-bound for hours while the wind howled like a troop of demons outside my retreat and the

lightning-strokes rattled almost like hailstones on the rubble outside. Sometimes the vengeful tempest would last only a few minutes and I'd be released to fly like a mouse seeking sanctuary from the cat for a few miles before I was driven to cover once more.

"There were several packs of emergency rations in the musette bag, and I made out for drink by chipping off bits of ice from the frozen mountain springs and melting them in my tin cup, but I was a mere rack of bones and tattered hide encased in still more tattered clothes, when I finally staggered into an outpost settlement in Nepal and fell babbling like an imbecile into the arms of a *sowar* sentry.

"The lamas' vengeance seemed confined to the territorial limits of Tibet, for I was unmolested during the entire period of my illness and convalescence in the Nepalese village.

"When I was strong enough to travel I was passed down country to my outfit, but I was still so ill and nervous that the company doctor gave me a certificate of physical disability and I was furnished with transportation home.

"I'd procured some scrap metal before embarking on the P. and O. boat, and in the privacy of my cabin I amused myself by testing the powers of the *Pi Yu*. Travel had not altered them, and in three days I had about ten pounds of gold where I'd had half that weight of iron.

"I was bursting with the wonderful news when I reached Waterbury, and could scarcely wait to tell my wife, but as I walked up the street toward my house an ugly, Mongolian-faced man suddenly stepped out from behind a roadside tree and barred my way. He did not utter a syllable, but stood immovable in the path before me, regarding me with such a look of concentrated malice and hatred that my breath caught fast in my throat. For perhaps half a minute he glared at me, then raised his left hand and pointed directly at my face. As his sleeve fell back, I caught the gleam of a string of small, red beads looped round his wrist. Next instant he turned away and seemed to walk through an invisible door in the air—one moment I saw him, the

next he had disappeared. As I stood staring stupidly at the spot where he had vanished, I felt a terrific blast of ice-cold wind blowing about me, tearing off my hat and sending me staggering against the nearest front-yard fence.

"The wind subsided in a moment, but it had blown away my peace of mind forever. From that instant I knew myself to be a marked man, a man whose only safety lay in flight and concealment.

"My daughter has told you the remainder of the story, how my wife was first to go, and how they found that accursed red bead which is the trademark of the lamas' blood-vengeance clasped in her hand; how my son was the next victim of those Tibetan devils' revenge, then my daughter Charlotte; now she, too, is marked for destruction. Oh, gentlemen"—his eyes once more roved restlessly about—"if you only knew the inferno of terror and uncertainty I've been through during these terrible years, you'd realize I've paid my debt to those mountain fiends ten times over with compound interest compounded tenfold!"

Our host ended his narrative almost in a shriek, then settled forward in his chair, chin sunk on breast, hands lying flaccidly in his lap, almost as if the death of which he lived in daily dread had overtaken him at last.

In the silence of the dimly lit drawing-room the logs burned with a softly hissing crackle; the little ormoiu clock on the marble mantel beat off the seconds with hushed, hurrying strokes as though it held its breath and went on tiptoe in fear of something lurking in the shadows. Outside the curtained windows the subsiding storm moaned dismally, like an animal in pain.

Jules de Grandin darted his quick, birdlike glance from the dejected Arkright to his white-lipped daughter, then at me, then back again at Arkright. "*Tiens, Monsieru,*" he remarked, "it would appear you find yourself in what the Americans call one damn-bad fix. *Sacre bleu,* those ape-faced men of the mountains know how to hate well, and they have the powers of the tempest at their command, while you have nothing but Jules de Grandin.

"No matter; it is enough. I do not think you will be attacked

again today. Make yourselves as happy as may be, keep careful watch for more of those damnation red beads, and notify me immediately one of them reappears. Meantime I go to dinner and to consult a friend whose counsel will assuredly show us a way out of our troubles. *Mademoiselle, Monsieur*, I wish you a very good evening." Bending formally from the hips, he turned on his heel and strode from the drawing room.

"Do you think there was anything in that cock-and-bull story of Arkright's?" I asked as we walked home through the clear, rain-washed April evening.

"Assuredly," he responded with a nod. "It has altogether the ring of truth, my friend. From what he tells us, the *Pi Yu* Stone which he and his friend stole from the men of the mountain is merely some little-known form of radium, and what do we know of radium, when all is said and done? *Barbe d'un pou*, nothing or less!

"True, we know the terrific and incessant discharge of etheric waves consequent on the disintegration of the radium atoms is so powerful that even such known and powerful forces as electrical energy are completely destroyed by it. In the presence of radium, we know, non-conductors of electricity become conductors, differences of potential cease to exist and electroscopes and Leyden jars fail to retain their charges. But all this is but the barest fraction of the possibilities.

"Consider: Not long ago we believed the atom to be the ultimate particle of matter, and thought all atoms had individuality. An atom of iron, for instance, was to us the smallest particle of iron possible, and differed distinctly from an atom of hydrogen. But with even such little knowledge as we already have of radioactive substances we have learned that all matter is composed of varying charges of electricity. The atom, we now believe, consists of a proton composed of a charge of positive electricity surrounded by a number of electrons, or negative charges, and the number of these electrons determines the nature of the atom. Radium itself, if left to itself, disintegrated into helium, finally into lead. Suppose, however,

the process be reversed. Suppose the radioactive emanations of this *Pi Yu* which Monsieur Arkright thieved away from the lamas, so affect the balance of protons and electrons of metals brought close to it as to change their atoms from atoms of zinc, lead or iron to atoms of pure gold. All that would be needed to do it would be a rearrangement of protons and electrons. The hypothesis is simple and believable, though not to be easily explained. You see?"

"No, I don't," I confessed, "but I'm willing to take your word for it. Meantime—"

"Meantime we have the important matter of dinner to consider," he interrupted with a smile as we turned into my front yard. "*Pipe d'un chameau*, I am hungry like a family of famished wolves with all this learned talk."

3

"TROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*, they are at their devil's work again—have you seen the evening papers?" de Grandin exclaimed as he burst into the office several days later.

"Eh—what?" I demanded, putting aside the copy of Corwin's monograph on Multiple Neuritis and staring at him. "Who are 'they,' and what have 'they' been up to?"

"Who? Name of a little green man, those devils of the mountains, those Tibetan priests, those servants of the *Pi Yu* Stone!" he responded. "Peruse *le journal*, if you please." He thrust a copy of the afternoon paper into my hand, seated himself on the corner of the desk and regarded his brightly polished nails with an air of deep solicitude. I read:

Gangland Suspected in Beauty's Death

Police believe it was to put the seal of eternal silence on her rouged lips that pretty Lillian Conover was "taken for a ride" late last night or early this morning. The young woman's body, terribly beaten and almost denuded of clothing, was found lying in one of the bunkers of the Sedgemoor Country Club's golf course

near the Albemarle Pike shortly after 6 o'clock this morning by an employee of the club. From the fact that no blood was found near the body, despite the terrible mauling it had received, police believe the young woman had been "put on the spot" somewhere else, then brought to the deserted links and left there by the slayers or their accomplices.

The Conover girl was known to have been intimate with a number of questionable characters, and had been arrested several times for shoplifting and petty thefts. It is thought she might have learned something of the secrets of a gang of bootleggers or hijackers and threatened to betray them to rival gangsters, necessitating her silencing by the approved methods of gangland.

The body, when found, was clothed in the remnants of a gray ensemble with a gray fox neck-piece and a silver mesh bag was still looped about one of her wrists. In the purse were four ten-dollar bills and some silver, showing conclusively that robbery was not the motive for the crime.

The authorities are checking up the girl's movements on the day before her death, and an arrest is promised within twenty-four hours.

"U'm?" I remarked, laying down the paper.

"U'm?" he mocked. "May the devil's choicest imps fly away with your 'u'ms', Friend Trowbridge. Come, get the car; we must be off."

"Off where?"

"Beard of a small blue pig, where, indeed, but to the spot where this so unfortunate girl's dead corpse was discovered? Delay not, we must utilize what little light remains!"

The bunker where poor Lillian Conover's broken body had been found was a banked sand-trap in the golf course about twenty-five yards from the highway. Throngs of morbidly curious sightseers had trampled the smoothly kept fairways all

day, brazenly defying the "Private Property—No Trespassing" signs with which the links were posted.

To my surprise, de Grandin showed little annoyance at the multitude of footprints about, but turned at once to the business of surveying the terrain. After half an hour's crawling back and forth across the turf, he rose and dusted his trouser knees with a satisfied sigh.

"*Succes!*" he exclaimed, raising his hand, thumb and forefinger clasped together on something which reflected the last rays of the sinking sun with an ominous red glow. "Behold, *mon ami*, I have found it; it is even as I suspected."

Looking closely, I saw he held a red bead, about the size of a small hazelnut, the exact duplicate of the little globule Haroldine Arkright had discovered in her reticule.

"Well?" I asked.

"*Barbe d'un Lievre*, yes; it is very well, indeed," he assented with a vigorous nod. "I was certain I should find it here, but had I not, I should have been greatly worried. Let us return, good friend; our quest is done."

I knew better than to question him as we drove slowly home, but my ears were open wide for any chance remark he might drop. However, he vouchsafed no comment till we reached home; then he hurried to the study and put an urgent call through to the Arkright mansion. Five minutes later he joined me in the library, a smile of satisfaction on his lips. "It is as I thought," he announced.

"*Mademoiselle* Haroldine went shopping yesterday afternoon, and the unfortunate Conover girl picked her pocket in the store. Forty dollars was stolen—forty dollars *and a red bead!*"

"She told you this?" I asked. "Why—"

"*Non, non,*" he shook his head. "She did tell me of the forty dollars, yes; the red bead's loss I already knew. Recall, my friend, how was it the poor dead one was dressed, according to the paper?"

"Er—"

"*Precisement.* Her costume was a cheap copy, a caricature, if you please, of the smart ensemble affected by *Mademoiselle*

Haroldine. Poor creature, she plied her pitiful trade of pocket-picking once too often, removed the contents of Haroldine's purse, including the sign of vengeance which had been put there, *le bon Dieu* knows how, and walked forth to her doom. Those who watched for a gray-clad woman with the fatal red ball seized upon her and called down their winds of destruction, even as they did upon the camp of Monsieur Arkright in the mountains of Tibet long years ago. Yes, it is undoubtedly so."

"Do you think they'll try again?" I asked. "They've already muffed things twice, and—"

"And, as your proverb has it, the third time is the charm," he cut in. "Yes, my friend, they will doubtlessly try again, and again, until they have worked their will, or been diverted. We must bend our energies toward the latter consummation."

"But that's impossible!" I returned. "If those lamas are powerful enough to seek their victims out in France, England and this country and kill them, there's not much chance for the Arkrights in flight, and it's hardly likely we'll be able to argue them out of their determination to exact payment for the theft of their—"

"Zut!" he interrupted with a smile. "You do talk much but say little, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I think it highly probable we shall convince the fish-faced gentlemen from Tibet they have more to gain by foregoing their vengeance than by collecting their debt."

4

. HARRISONVILLE'S NEWEST CITIZEN had delayed her debut with truly feminine capriciousness, and my vigil at City Hospital had been long and nerve-racking. Half an hour before I had resorted to the Weigand-Martin method of ending the performance, and, shaking with nervous reaction, took the red, wrinkled and astonishingly vocal morsel of humanity from the nurse's hands and laid it in its mother's arms; then, nearer exhaustion than I cared to admit, set out for home and bed.

A rivulet of light trickled under the study door and the murmur of voices mingled with the acrid aroma of de Grandin's cigarette came to me as I let myself in the front door. "*Eh bien*, my friend," the little Frenchman was asserting, "I damn realize that he who sups with the devil must have a long spoon; therefore I have requested your so invaluable advice.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," his uncannily sharp ears recognized my tread as I stepped softly into the hall, "May we trespass on your time a moment? It is of interest."

With a sigh of regret for my lost sleep I put my obstetrical kit on a chair and pushed open the study door.

Opposite de Grandin was seated a figure which might have been the original of the queer little manikins with which Chinese ivory-carvers love to ornament their work. Hardly more than five feet tall, his girth was so great that he seemed to overflow the confines of the armchair in which he lounged. His head, almost totally void of hair, was nearly globular in shape, and the smooth, hairless skin seemed stretched drum-tight over the fat with which his skull was generously upholstered. Cheeks plump to the point of puffiness almost forced his oblique eyes shut; yet, though his eyes could scarcely be seen, it required no deep intuition to know that they always saw. Between his broad, flat nose and a succession of chins was set incongruously a small, sensitive mouth, full-lipped but mobile, and drooping at the corners in a sort of perpetual sad smile.

"Dr. Feng," de Grandin introduced, "this is my very good friend, Dr. Trowbridge. Trowbridge, my friend, this is Dr. Feng Yuin-han, whose wisdom is about to enable us to foil the machinations of those wicked ones who threaten Mademoiselle Haroldine. Proceed, if you please, *cher ami*," he motioned the fat little Chinaman to continue the remark he had cut short to acknowledge the introduction.

"It is rather difficult to explain," the visitor returned in a soft, unaccented voice, "but if we stop to remember that the bird stands midway between the reptile and the mammal we may perhaps understand why it is that the cock's blood is most acceptable to those elemental forces which my unfortunate

superstitious countrymen seek to proptitiate in their temples. These malignant influences were undoubtedly potent in the days we refer to as the age of reptiles, and it may be the cock's lineal descent from the pterodactyl gives his blood the quality of possessing certain emanations soothing to the tempest spirits. In any event, I think you would be well advised to employ such blood in your protective experiments."

"And the ashes?" de Grandin put in eagerly.

"Those I can procure for you by noon tomorrow. Camphor wood is something of a rarity here, but I can obtain enough for your purpose, I am sure."

"*Bon, tres bon!*" the Frenchman exclaimed delightedly. "If those camel-faces will but have the consideration to wait our preparations, I damn think we shall tender them the party of surprize. Yes. *Parbleu*, we shall astonish them!"

Shortly after noon the following day an asthmatic Ford delivery wagon bearing the picture of a crowing cockerel and the legend

P. GRASSO

Vendita di Pollame Vivi

on its weatherworn leatherette sides drew up before the house, and an Italian youth in badly soiled corduroys and with a permanent expression indicative of some secret sorrow climbed lugubriously from the driver's seat, took a covered two-gallon can, obviously originally intended as a container for Quick's Grade A Lard, from the interior of the vehicle and advanced toward the front porch.

"Docta de Grandin 'ere?" he demanded as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, answered his ring.

"No, he ain't," the indignant Nora informed him, "an' if he wuz, 'tis at th' back door th' likes o' you should be inquirin' fer 'im!"

The descendant of the Caesars was in no mood for argument. "You taka dissa bucket an' tella heem I breeng it—Pete Grasso," he returned, thrusting the lard tin into the scandalized housekeeper's hands. "You tella heem I sella da han, I sella da roosta, too, an' I keela heem w'an my customers ask for it; but I

no lika for sella da blood. No, *santissimo Dio*, not me! *Perche il sangue e la vita*—how you say? Da blood, he are da life; I not lika for carry heem aroun’.”

“Howly Mither, is it blood ye’re afther givin’ me ter hold onto?” exclaimed Nora in rising horror. “Ye murtherin’ dago, come back ’ere an’ take yer divilish—”

But P. Grasso, dealer in live poultry, had cranked his decrepit flivver into a state of agitated life and set off down the street, oblivious of the choice insults which Mrs. McGinnis sent in pursuit of him.

“Sure, Dr. Trowbridge, sor,” she confided as she entered the consulting room, the lard tin held at arm’s length, “ ’tis th’ fine gintleman Dr. de Grandin is entirely; but he do be afther doin’ some crazy things at times. Wud ye be afther takin’ charge o’ this mess o’ blood fer him? ’Tis meself as wouldn’t touch it wid a fifthy-foot pole, so I wouldn’t, once I’ve got it out o’ me hands!”

“Well,” I laughed as I espied a trim little figure turning into my front yard, “here he comes now. You can tell him your opinion of his practises if you want.”

“Ah, Docthor, darlin’, ye know I’d niver have th’ heart to scold ’im,” she confessed with a shamefaced grin. “Sure, he’s th’—”

The sudden hysterical cachinnation of the office telephone bell cut through her words, and I turned to the shrilling instrument.

For a moment there was no response to my rather impatient “Hello?”: then dimly, as one entering a darkened room slowly begins to descry objects about him, I made out the hoarse, ralelike rasp of deep-drawn irregular breathing.

“Hello?” I repeated, more sharply.

“Dr. Trowbridge,” a low, almost breathless feminine voice whispered over the wire, “this is Haroldine Arkright. Can you come right over with Dr. de Grandin? Right away? Please. It—it’s *here!*”

“Right away!” I called back, and wheeled about, almost colliding with the little Frenchman, who had been listening over my shoulder.

"Quick, speed, haste!" he cried, as I related her message. "We must rush, we must hurry, we must fly, my friend! There is not a second to lose!"

As I charged down the hall and across the porch to my waiting car he stopped long enough to seize the lard tin from beside my desk and two bulky paper parcels from a hall chair, then almost trod on my heels in his haste to enter the motor.

5

"NOT HERE, *Monsieur*, if you please," de Grandin ordered as he surveyed the living-room where Arkright and his daughter awaited us. "Is there no room without furniture, where we can meet the foeman face to face? I would fight over a flat terrain, if possible."

"There's a vacant bedroom on the next floor," Arkright replied, "but—"

"No buts, if you please; let us ascend at once, immediately, right away!" the Frenchman interrupted. "Oh, make haste, my friends! Your lives depend upon it, I do assure you!"

About the floor of the empty room de Grandin traced a circle of chicken's blood, painting a two-inch-wide ruddy border on the bare boards, and inside the outer circle he drew another, forcing Haroldine and her father within it. Then, with a bit of rag, he wiped a break in the outside line, and opening one of his paper parcels proceeded to scatter a thin layer of soft, white wood-ashes over the boards between the two circles.

"Now, *mon vieux*, if you will assist," he turned to me, ripping open the second package and bringing to light a tin squirt-gun of the sort used to spray insecticide about a room infested with mosquitoes.

Dipping the nozzle of the syringe into the blood-filled lard tin, he worked the plunger back and forth a moment, then handed the contrivance to me. "Do you stand at my left," he commanded, "and should you see footprints in the ashes, spray the fowl's blood through the air above them. Remember, my friend, it is most important that you act with speed."

"Footprints in the ashes—" I began incredulously, wondering if he had lost his senses, but a sudden current of glacial air sweeping through the room chilled me into silence.

"Ah! of the beautiful form is *Mademoiselle*, and who was I to know that cold wind of Tibetan devils would display it even more than this exquisite *robe d'Orient*?" said de Grandin.

Clad in a wondrous something, she explained fright had so numbed her that dressing had been impossible.

"When did you first know they were here?" de Grandin whispered, turning his head momentarily toward the trembling couple inside the inner circle, then darting a watchful glance about the room as though he looked for an invisible enemy to materialize from the air.

"I found the horrible red ball in my bath," Haroldine replied in a low, trembling whisper. "I screamed when I saw it, and Daddy got up to come to me, and there was one of them under his ash-tray; so I telephoned your house right away, and—"

"S-s-st!" the Frenchman's sibilant warning cut her short. "*Garde a vous*, Friend Trowbridge! *Fixe!*" As though drawing a saber from its scabbard he whipped the keen steel sword blade from his walking-stick and swished it whiplike through the air. "The cry is still '*On ne passe pas!*' my friends!"

There was the fluttering of the tiny breeze along the bedroom floor, not like a breeze from outside, but an eerie, tentative sort of wind, a wind which trickled lightly over the doorsill, rose to a blast, paused a moment in reconnaissance, then crept forward experimentally, as though testing the strength of our defenses.

A light, pit-pattering noise, as though an invisible mouse were circling the room, sounded from the shadows; then, to my horrified amazement, there appeared the print of a broad, naked foot in the film of ashes de Grandin had spread upon the floor!

Wave on wave of goose-flesh rose on my arms and along my neck as I watched the first print followed by a second, for there was no body above them, no sign nor trace of any alien presence in the place; only, as the keys of a mechanical piano are depressed as the strings respond to the notes of the reeling

record, the smooth coating of ashes gave token of the onward march of some invisible thing.

"Quick, my friend, shoot where you see the prints!" de Grandin cried in a shrill, excited voice, and I thrust the plunger of my pump home, sending out a shower of ruddy spray.

As invisible ink takes form when the paper is held before a flame, there was suddenly outlined in the empty air before us the visage of—

"*Sapristi!* 'Tis Yama himself, King of Hell! God of Death! *Hola, mon brave,*" de Grandin called almost jocularly as the vision took form wherever the rain of fowl's blood struck, "it seems we meet face to face, though you expected it not. *Mon d'un porc,* is this the courtesy of your country? You seem not overjoyed to meet me.

"Lower, Friend Trowbridge," he called from the corner of his mouth, keepin wary eyes fixed upon the visitant, "aim for his legs; there is a trick I wish to show him."

Obediently, I aimed the syringe at the footless footprints in the ashes, and a pair of broad, naked feet sprang suddenly into view.

"*Bien,*" the Frenchman commended, then with a sudden forward thrust of his foot engaged the masked Mongolian's ankle in a grapevine twist and sent the fellow sprawling to the floor. The blue and gold horror that was the face of Yama came off disclosing a leering, slant-eyed lama.

"Now, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin remarked, placing his sword-point against the other's throat directly above the palpitating jugular vein, "I damn think perhaps you will listen to reason, *hein?*"

The felled man gazed malignantly into his conqueror's face, but neither terror nor surrender showed in his sullen eyes.

"*Morbleu,* he is a brave savage, this one," de Grandin muttered, then lapsed into a wailing, singsong speech the like of which I had never heard.

A look of incredulous disbelief, then of interest, finally of amazed delight, spread over the copper-colored features of the fallen man as the little Frenchman progressed. Finally he

answered with one or two coughing ejaculations, and at a sign from de Grandin rose to his feet and stood with his hands lifted above his head.

"Monsieur Arkright," the Frenchman called without taking his eyes from his captive, "have the goodness to fetch the *Pi Yu* Stone without delay. I have made a treaty with this emissary of the lamas. If you return his treasure to him at once he will repair forthwith to his lamasery and trouble you and yours no more."

"But what about my wife, and my children these fiends killed?" Arkright expostulated. "Are they to go scotfree? How do I know they'll keep their word? I'm damned if I'll return the *Pi Yu*!"

"You will most certainly be killed if you do not," de Grandin returned coolly. "As to your damnation, I am a sinful man, and do not presume to pronounce judgment on you, though I fear the worst unless you mend your morals. Come, will you return this man his property, or do I release him and bid him do his worst?"

Muttering imprecations, Arkright stepped across the barrier of blood, left the room and returned in a few minutes with a small parcel wrapped in what appeared to be thin plates of gold.

De Grandin took it from his hand and presented it to the Tibetan with a ceremonious bow.

"*Ki lao yeh hsieh ti to lo*," the man pressed his clasped hands to his breast and bowed nearly double to the Frenchman.

"*Parbleu*, yes, and Dr. Trowbridge, too," my little friend returned, indicating me with a wave of his hand.

The Tibetan bent ceremoniously toward me as de Grandin added, "*Ch'i kan*."

"What did he say?" I demanded, returning the Asiatic's salute.

"He says, 'The honorable, illustrious sir has my heartfelt thanks,' or words to that effect, and I insist that he say the same of you, my friend," de Grandin returned. "Name of a small green pig, I do desire that he understand there are two honorable men in the room besides himself.

"*En avant, mon brave*," he motioned the Tibetan toward the

door with his sword, then lowered his point with a flourish, saluting the Arkrights with military punctilio.

"Mademoiselle Haroldine," he said, "it is a great pleasure to have served you. May your approaching marriage be a most happy one.

"Monsieur Arkright, I have saved your life, and, though against your will, restored your honor. It is true you have lost your gold, but self-respect is a more precious thing. Next time you desire to steal, permit that I suggest you select a less vengeful victim than a Tibetan brotherhood. *Parbleu*, those savages they have no sense of humor at all! When a man robs them, they take it with the worst possible grace."

"*Pipe d'un chameau*"—Jules de Grandin brushed an imaginary fleck of dust from the sleeve of his dinner jacket and refilled his liqueur glass—"it has been a most satisfactory day, Friend Trowbridge. Our experiment was one grand, unqualified success; we have restored stolen property to its rightful owners, and I have told that Monsieur Arkright what I think of him."

"U'm," I murmured. "I suppose it's all perfectly clear to you, but I'm still in the dark about it all."

"Perfectly," he agreed with one of his quick, elfin smiles. "Howeverly, that can be remedied. Attend me, if you please:

"When first we interviewed Mademoiselle Haroldine and her father, I smelt the odor of Tibet in this so strange business. Those red beads, they could have come from but one bit of jewelry, and that was the rosary of a Buddhist monk of Tibet. Yes. Now, in the course of my travels in that devil-infested land, I had seen those old lamas do their devil-dances and command the elements to obey their summons and wreak vengeance on their enemies. 'Very well,' I tell me, 'if this be a case of lamas' magic, we must devise magic which will counteract it.'

"'Of course,' I agree with me. 'For every ill there is a remedy. Men living in the lowlands know cures for malaria; those who inhabit the peaks know the cure for mountain fever. They must do so, or they die. Very well, is it not highly probable that the Mongolian people have their own safeguards against these

mountain devils? If it were not so, would not Tibet completely dominate all China?"

"‘You have right,’ I compliment me, ‘but whom shall we call on for aid?’

"Thereupon I remember that my old friend, Dr. Feng Yuin-han, whom I have known at the Sorbonne, is at present residing in New York, and it is to him I send my message for assistance. *Parbleu*, when he comes he is as full of wisdom as a college professor attempts to appear! He tells me much in our nighttime interview before you arrive from your work of increasing the population. I learn from him, for instance, that when these old magicians of the mountains practise their devil’s art, they automatically limit their powers. Invisible they may become, yes; but while invisible, they may not overstep a pool, puddle or drop of chicken blood. For some strange reason, such blood makes a barrier which they can not pass and across which they can not hurl a missile nor send their destroying winds or devastating lightning-flashes. Further, if chicken blood be cast upon them their invisibility at once melts away, and while they are in the process of becoming visible in such circumstances their physical strength is greatly reduced. One man of normal lustiness would be a match for fifty of them half visible, half unseen because of fresh fowl’s blood splashed on them.

"*Voila*, I have my grand strategy of defense already mapped out for me. From the excellent Pierre Grasso I buy much fresh chicken blood, and from Dr. Feng I obtain the ashes of the mystic camphor tree. The blood I spread around in an almost-circle, that our enemy may attack us from one side only, and inside the outer stockade of gore I scatter camphor wood ashes that his footprints may become visible and betray his position to us. Then, inside our outer ramparts, I draw a second complete circle of blood which the enemy can not penetrate at all, so that Monsieur Arkright, but most of all his so charming daughter, may be safe. Then I wait.

"Presently comes the foe. He circles our first line of defenses, finds the break I have purposely left, and walks into our trap. In

the camphor wood ashes his all-invisible feet leave visible footprints to warn of his approach.

"With your aid, then, I do spray him with the blood as soon as his footprints betray him, and make him visible so that I may slay him at my good convenience. But he are no match for me. *Non*, Jules de Grandin would not call it the sport to kill such as he; it would not be fair. Besides, is there not much to be said on his side? I think so.

"It was the cupidity of Monsieur Arkright and no other thing which brought death upon his wife and children. We have no way of telling that the identical man whom I have overthrown murdered those unfortunate ones, and it is not just to take his life for his fellows' crimes. As for legal justice, what court would listen believably to our story? *Cordieu*, to relate what we have seen these last few days to the ordinary lawyer would be little better than confessing ourselves mad or infatuated with too much of the so execrable liquor which your prosperous bootleggers supply. Me, I have no wish to be thought a fool.

"Therefore, I say to me, 'It is best that we call this battle a draw. Let us give back to the men of the mountains that which is theirs and take their promise that they will no longer pursue Monsieur Arkright and Mademoiselle Haroldine. Let there be no more beads from the Devil's rosary scattered across their path.'

"Very good. I make the equal bargain with the Tibetan; his property is returned to him and—

"My friend, I suffer!"

"Eh?" I exclaimed, shocked at the tragic face he turned to me.

"*Nom d'un canon*, yes; my glass is empty again!"

(As we go to press, we are saddened to hear of the passing of Seabury Quinn, December 24, 1969. An appreciation will appear in our forthcoming issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR: No. 34.)

The Cauldron

Since I wrote the commentary on Philo Vance, which appeared in our 14th issue (Winter 1969/70), Fawcett Gold Medal books have issued the third and fourth novels in the series: *The Greene Murder Case* and *The Bishop Murder Case*. Both stand up very well under re-reading, so that I would not hesitate to recommend them; but if you are not acquainted with Philo Vance, I'd still suggest that you start at the beginning. If you enjoy the first, the odds are good that you will find all of them rewarding in one way or another, despite the point that one of our correspondents makes below.

William H. Desmond writes from South Boston, Mass.: "To fill in the missing background of Willard Huntington Wright, I'll paraphrase Carl R. Dolmetsch's biographical coverage of the man's life as detailed in *THE SMART SET: A History and Anthology*.

"Willard Huntington Wright was born in 1888 in Virginia. He was a precocious child; by age eighteen, he had studied an astonishing range of subjects at three colleges, leaving Harvard in 1906 because '... they had nothing more to teach me.' He went to Paris to study art with his brother, McDonald Wright, a well-known 'Futurist' painter, then went to California to become literary editor of the *LOS ANGELES TIMES* at the age of nineteen! A fortunate correspondence developed between Wright and H. L. Mencken, when Wright gave a very favorable review of Mencken's

Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Mencken was later to recommend Wright for the job as editor of *THE SMART SET* (probably the single most influential literary force of its day: 1900-1930. As an indication of its influence, one should note that *THE SMART SET* published some of the first literary works of James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Eugene O'Neil, and James Branch Cabel.)

"When he became editor of *THE SMART SET*, in 1913, Wright had so beguiled and overcome his publisher that he had been given *carte blanche* in editorial policy, which he exercised with a ruthless abandon in the 12 issues he edited. For 1913, they were a blistering *avant garde*. He was dismissed by his nearly bankrupted publisher after a dispute. Wright's fortunes prospered for another three and one-half years after his dismissal from *THE SMART SET* in 1914: a contributing editorship (*INTERNATIONAL STUDIO*) in 1915; a successful book on Nietzsche in 1916; his equally successful book, *Modern Painting*, in 1917, as well as a literary editorship with the *NEW YORK EVENING MAIL*.

"An unfortunate and ill-considered pro-German joke he played on a jittery, war-hysterical secretary cost him and another innocent person their jobs. Because of this, Wright found himself virtually blacklisted by many American publications. Going West, he was forced to seek a living by pseudonymous free-lancing, and menial copy-desk work

for long hours and short pay. Under the strain of this, his health broke; and, as a result of long periods of sedation, Wright became a narcotics addict. In 1922 he went to Paris for 'the cure.' The rest of his story is as detailed in your editorial for *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* No. 14. Wright went on from the boredom of his psychotherapeutical confinement to carve out a whole new career for himself in literature as 'S. S. Van Dine.' "

Thanks, Bill, both for this letter and loaning me a copy of *THE SMART SET* anthology and history. At this writing, I have finished reading the utterly fabulous and fantastic history of that magazine and have just started on the selections; I'd say the history alone is worth the rather high price of the volume—high only in the absolute sense; not exorbitant in relation to what the buyer gets in this handsome book.

Frank Rowan writes from Omaha: "Your comment on S. S. Van Dine and the Philo Vance stores was very interesting, but you failed to mention one thing about the series. Wright had a formula which he followed with teutonic thoroughness and consistency. The result is that while you can read one or two of the Philo Vance stories and possibly be baffled, by the third you should begin to recognize the formula, and then you do not have to pay any attention at all to the clues: you must detect the writer. I won't bother to mention what the secret is, since you'd cut it out anyway."

You're right, Friend Rowan; I would. And since at the time I received your letter, I wasn't aware of just what the formula was, I appreciate your courtesy in not revealing too much too soon. (Unfortunately, others have been more wanton in this respect, and I came across

a reference to it, which spelled it out in detail, a week or so ago.)

I would have mentioned that it existed had I been aware of it; the fact of the matter is, I'm not at all a clever reader, and back in the '30s when I first read most of the Philo Vance novels, I was even less so. So I never got on to the formula then.

How important is it, really? Well, it's important if you read detective puzzle-mystery novels and stories only for the sake of the puzzle; or again it's important if a story has virtually nothing to offer in it except the puzzle. If you're blessed with a short memory, of course, you can re-read them years later and still be entertained. But what I'm doing here is discussing fictional detectives, whose exploits I've found fascinating upon more or less recent re-reading; and none of this series has (or shall be) written without a good deal of preliminary re-reading. Philo Vance is perhaps the closest yet to an exception, since I was able to obtain only the first two novels in the series, *The Benson Murder Case* and *The Canary Murder Case* for re-examination before starting. (Had I found them a disappointment upon re-reading, I wouldn't have devoted an entire editorial to Vance!)

Despite the sneers of some academic critics and professors, etc., the great fictional detectives *do* have something to offer in addition to the excitement of the chase, the eccentricities of the detective, and the initial (we hope) startling revelation. It is the backgrounds in the best Van Dine novels that I find fascinating; and while Wright lacks the humanity of Agatha Christie and her insights into human behavior and motivation, presented in such a way as to arouse interest in and sympathy for a fair number of her victims and culprits—but not the sentimental sort you get in today's successors to the

old-fashioned sob-sisters—his characters do remain interesting, to me.

Vance, of course, is a mixture of seriousness and sheer spoof on the part of the author. As with the formula for uncovering the culprit, Vance himself can be believable with a little effort in one or two novels, but is quite incredible when you add *all* his talents and skills, etc. together, as revealed in the entire series. But then, his literary father, Willard Huntington Wright was quite incredible, too.

Reed S. Andrus writes from Korea: "Stories such as *The Feline Phantom* are too easily seen through in my opinion. It is a sure fact that the narrator of the story will succumb to the curse after the first two pages. Rate it with an X.

"*The White Domino* was a rather unsettling story, but for some reason, I didn't care for it. Perhaps it was the author's style. Rate it 4.

"*The Parasite* could have been a very good story, if more emphasis had been put on detail, and it had been longer. The author had a good style. Rate it 3.

"*The Consuming Flame* again ended too short and too pat. But Ernst has a way of enticing the reader with the first couple of chapters, which raises it above the mediocre level. Rate it 2.

"*The Dogs of Doctor Dwann* is first with me, strictly because the author is Edmond Hamilton. This was a minor Hamilton story, but I broke into fan ranks on the likes of him. Rate it 1.

"A big fat 0 for Lovecraft. The story I have read countless times, always good. The man was the King of Weird, so far as I'm concerned, and I'll defend his writing as long as I'm able.

"On the whole, a lower mark than I would give to past issues. Nevertheless, I read it from cover to cover, which verifies the fact that you are making admirable strides toward achieving the

status of the pulp *WEIRD TALES*. A compliment, I believe.

"One more comment—in defense of the 'series characters'. Keep them coming. Your reprinting of Jules de Grandin in SMS, and the Cornwall stories in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, deserves nothing but praise. I'm only sorry that Howard didn't write as many Solomon Kane stories as he did about Conan."

You certainly have a valid point about "curse" stories in general; it is true that the reader usually knows that the narrator, or a principal character, is going to be a victim of the curse. Yet, this type of story has long been popular and is still enjoyed by many intelligent and discriminating readers, when well done. Why? My guess is that the center of suspense is not *whether* the victim will go down, but rather how it all comes out in detail; and in this respect, it is pretty much the same thing as with any story where the principal is in deadly and seemingly hopeless peril, particularly in the early or middle part of the tale. We all know that he'll come through, but we don't know how. It's not at all unlike the movie, *Titanic*. Did anyone in the audience not know that ship would strike an iceberg? The makers assumed otherwise, and worked it from this angle: They'll all know it's going to happen, but they won't know *when*. And you became so involved with the affairs of some of the passengers that you were almost as shocked as they when that strange shudder ran through the ship—the difference being, of course, that you knew exactly what it meant.

So, perhaps you didn't care for *The Feline Phantom* not because it was a "curse" story, and you knew that the curse would be fulfilled, but rather that, for you, it was not well done enough.

Veronica Cross writes from San

Antonio: "Even if it did bring back memories of that old movie, *The Thing*, I thought Dorothy Norman Cooke's story, *The Parasite*, was one of the most eerie stories you have had in SMS for some time. I liked the casual, matter-of-fact way in which it was written, too.

Why didn't you put Richard Lupoff's article on the ballot? I would have tied it with *The Parasite* if you had. The editorial was interesting, as usual, and I can understand why that doesn't appear on the ballot, but I do think that an unusual article like *The Case of the Doctor Who Had No Business* should have been there.

"I suppose it's no use asking you whether Ascot Keane ever does get Doctor Satan completely. Each story is good, but the thought that no matter what happens, Doctor Satan will be back in an issue or two is beginning to become depressing. I'd like to see a final victory some time so that Keane can get to something else."

You're right: It's no use asking me to tell you in advance whether Keane ever does finish off Doctor Satan. But I'll give you one hint: There are three more stories in the series after *Horror Insured*.

So far as putting articles on the ballot goes, I am entirely in favor of it, but experience has shown that the readers are not, as a whole. Too many complain that it confuses things, since they do not know how they can fairly rate an article in relation to stories. While I would find no difficulty—I'd simply tie the article with a story, in relation to its excellence as an article, if I did not want to rate it in a specific position in place of a story—it would be very foolish of me to insist upon doing something which would only result in my getting fewer ballots, or fewer complete ones. Some readers would solve the problem by not rating the article at all—and this would

really bollix my scoring system. So the lesser evil is merely to omit the article (or verse, or editorial—I've tried putting all on the ballot, with the same unsatisfactory results: no fair estimate of its actual impact upon the reader possible) and run comments of interest. I can say that those received thus far indicate that you, the readers, approved the Lupoff article.

J. P. Renfield writes from Charleston: "I have no animus against H. P. Lovecraft; on the contrary, I consider *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* a masterpiece of weird literature and *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* a beautiful fantasy, not despite the loose, rambling construction, but partly because of it. A tight plot would have spoiled it entirely. But it puzzles me at the very least to find such adulation lavished on minor and flawed stories like *The Outsider*.

"Technical details as to whether this is a tale of revelation or confirmation seem rather irrelevant, although I'll admit that the story comes off somewhat better as a tale of confirmation. The flaw is the degree of sophistication to which the narrator has supposedly achieved without ever having seen or otherwise had contact with a single human being. And since the only living creature he has ever seen before emergence has been "... something mockingly like myself..." *this* should have been his standard of normality, while the pictures of ordinary humans would be strange and perhaps repulsive. That adjective 'mockingly' is very much out of place, and a part of what is wrong with the story.

"I can see how *The Outsider* would seem to be a masterpiece of horror to the inexperienced reader. Perhaps I would have been really taken by it had I read it at a very early age; but when one has had some experience with thinking

about the implications of what one is reading, some stories require not only suspension of disbelief but suspension of logical thought entirely. In an adventure story, or a thriller, one can put logic aside just for the sake of excitement—but *The Outsider* was so obviously and painfully intended to be literature!

"If you're going to resurrect further short stories by Lovecraft, I do hope you'll be kinder and select ones that do him and his reputation credit."

In choosing stories to reprint, I do not even begin to insist upon flawlessness—although one that strikes me as being unflawed in any way is always a welcome discovery, or rather rediscovery as I re-read each potential reprint carefully, rather than relying upon memory. (Some have been sorrowfully put back after re-reading.) The question I ask myself, then, is: Do the flaws seem to be fatal? And I examine this question with particular rigor when the story under consideration

is one which many readers have urged me to reprint. Often as not, the nomination for reprint will not be a story the requester has never read, but one which he has read and re-read many times. He wants other readers to share his pleasure.

Such an instance was *The Outsider*. I myself was, as you put it, most inexperienced when I first read the story circa 1933, and saw no faults at all in it. I remembered the faults, after they were pointed out to me—particularly when the requests first started coming in for reprint; but another re-reading convinced me that, though serious, they are not fatal. The story still has impact despite them.

But it is the readers who will have to decide, in that measure of consensus that we are able to achieve here, whether my decision was a mistake. As this is being

typed, comments of enthusiasm for the story far outweigh dislike or complaint.

Dennis Lien writes from Tucson, Arizona: "The cover didn't impress me either way—perhaps unfavorably, if anything. It might have better appeared on MOH; a hanged man may be horrible, but neither startling nor mysterious.

"1. *The Outsider*: I suspect this is going to win in a walk. I won't mark it outstanding, and I don't think it's one of Lovecraft's best, but I did enjoy the chance to read it again. I wish you could have reproduced also the Finlay illustration that appeared with it in its *FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES* reprint. I suspect you're right about it being intended to be a story of 'confirmation', rather than 'revelation'; still, the damn thing reads so much like one of the latter . . .

"2. *The White Domino*: I was quite surprised by this one, having been totally unimpressed by my previous contacts with material from *GHOST STORIES*. I expected nothing and got something; even as a straight back-from-the-dead-to-win-the-young-man's-heart story, it wouldn't have been too bad, and the twist ending—which caught me unprepared—made it actually good.

"3. *The Case of the Doctor Who Had No Business*: Third, simply because I'm a sucker for this sort of story/pseudo-scholarship, and because it had no strong competition. I'm a bit dubious about the tie-in between the Great Detective and the Master of Adventure, however. I haven't read the early Tarzan books for many years, and don't have copies handy to check at the moment, but—even if ERB says *Tarzan of the Apes* begins in 1888, I won't believe it. *The Son of Tarzan*, published in *ALL-STORY* in late 1915 and early 1916, ends with Tarzan's son of marriageable age. Granted that they mature fast in the jungle, Tarzan himself

Coming Next Issue

"Tonight after I retired," he said suspiciously, "Forsythe and his wife sat in the library, reading. The library is a big room, Lovell, with a single table against the fireplace. You know; you've been in there more than once, snooping around. Jean and Anne were seated on opposite sides of the table there.

"There's only one door to the library, Lovell. Only one door, and it leads out on the lower corridor. According to Forsythe that door opened with a sharp click and swung inward, as if the wind had blown it open. But there was no wind, or any draft in the hall. I won't have windows open at night, Lovell. You know that. And they weren't open tonight or any other night. If that door opened, it was opened by somebody with a pair of hands, Lovell, and the knob turned.

"But the doorway was empty, Jean says. He picked up his book again and went on reading. For about two minutes - maybe more - he gazed down at the book. Then, all at once from the other side of the table, Anne screamed. A horrible scream, Lovell. Horrible! So Forsythe says."

"You don't believe him?" I suggested.

"Believe him? Let me finish and decide for yourself. I was saying, Jean dropped his book again and stared across at his wife in amazement. He jerked to his feet just in time, horrified, as a pair of misty, huge bluish hands encircled her throat. Those hands, he said, snapped her out of the chair with such uncanny strength that her scream died instantly. Mind you, Lovell, there wasn't a living thing near her. Not a suggestion of any human form. Yet she was whipped out of the chair with awful quickness, and those unattached hands broke her.

"Forsythe got to her side somehow, just as the hands darted back and dangled in midair. The girl slumped down. There was a sudden sucking, scraping sound and a rush of air, and the hands were gone. Huge, hairy hands, Lovell, distorted beyond belief. And the girl was dead. Dead with a broken neck."

"And Forsythe," I said, "told you this?"

He glared at me balefully for a moment, as if expecting me to say something more violent. Then, with a shrug: "Jean took his wife to her room," he said curtly. "That was about quarter to one. He called me immediately. I sent for you. What do you think, Lovell? Hey? What do you think?"

I was silent.

"It's beyond you. I thought it would be, Lovell. You don't believe in the supernatural."

What happened in Mark Mallory's library? What was

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#2, Fall 1968: *The House of Horror*, Seabury Quinn; *The Men in Black*, John Brunner; *The Strange Case of Pascal*, Roger Eugene Ulmer; *The Witch is Dead*, Edward D. Hoch; *Doctor Satan*, Paul Ernst; *The Secret of the City*, Terry Carr & Ted White; *The Street* (verse), Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Scourge of B'Moth*, Bertam Russell.

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Order From Page 125

thus must be at least in his late thirties in 1915, which would set the last voyage of the *Fuwalda* back to circa 1876 at the latest, over ten years before the appearance of one John Clayton at Baker Street. To believe that *Tarzan of the Apes* began in 1888 is to believe that Korak underwent his jungle adventures at an age of approximately six or seven; hence the coincidence of the name, 'John Clayton' must be just that—a pity, too.

"4. *The Dogs of Doctor Dwann*: A fine spooky scene early in the story, where Jameson is pursued through the forest by the half-seen dog-men. When I came to the illustration on page 29, and the distinction made between dog-men and man-dogs, I burst out laughing—which is some sort of response, but not the one the story was supposed to generate.

"5. *The Parasite*: The oldest plot in fantasy: a monster is loose and killing people. One of the oldest sorts of monster: a man-munching plant. Crude plotting and writing. And still—I liked it. I'm a bit ashamed to admit it, but I liked it.

"6. *The Consuming Flame*: Some detest Jules de Grandin, others can't stand Simon Ark. I'm rather fond of both of these, but I've learned to look forward with no joy to the reading of the Doctor Satan novelets that you keep throwing at us. As you pointed out earlier, they seem to be an attempt to cash in on the sex-and-sadism school without its excesses. I'm afraid the result is neither good weird nor good sex-and-sadism (if there can be such a thing). I presume there can't be a great many left, and don't really mind one turning up every third issue or so—obviously some of your readers must enjoy them, and I'm enough of a completist to favor printing a series in totality if at all. But I'm looking forward to the day you run out of Doctor Satan.



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#8, Spring 1968: *The White Lady of the Orphanage*, Seabury Quinn; *The Gray People*, John Campbell Haywood (introduction by Sam Moskowitz); *And Then No More...* Jay Tyler; *The Endocrine Monster*, R. Anthony; *The Return of the Sorcerer*, Clark Ashton Smith; *The Three from the Tomb*, Edmond Hamilton.

#9, Summer 1968: *The Black Mass*, Col. S. P. Meek; *The Last Archer*, Earl Peirce, Jr.; *The Sight of Roses*, Jay Tyler; *Webbed Hands*, Ferdinand Berthoud; *Acrophobia* (verse), L. Sprague de Camp; *Hollywood Horror*, Paul Ernst.

#10, Fall 1968: *The House of the Living Dead*, Harold Ward; *The Indoor Safari*, Max Nugor; *The House Party at Smoky Island*, L. M. Montgomery; *Settler's Wall*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Island of Missing Ships*, Seabury Quinn.

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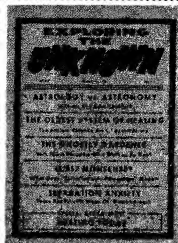
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Strange—I've liked every other Paul Ernst story I've encountered.

"7. *The Feline Phantom*: Not really bad; not good—competently done enough to avoid an X.

Your discussion of the Philo Vance novels was the most interesting thing in the issue—as your editorials have a habit of being, even in stronger issues than this one, I read ten of the novels in the space of a few months, some nine or ten years ago, and haven't opened one since. I'd definitely agree that the last half-dozen weren't up to his earlier work, though I did enjoy *The Dragon Murder Case*, which I believe was No. 8. Incidentally, I think you're wrong about there being only eleven Philo Vance novels—I've seen several references to a posthumous No. 12: *The Winter Murder Case*, though I've never been able to find a copy. Someone once remarked that he could always pick the murderer in a Vance novel, because he always entered the book on the same page; while an exaggeration, that seems to sum up the later novels rather well, though I'd still like to pick up copies of the ones I'm missing and read the *Casino* and *Winter* cases. Paperback Library reprinted two or three of the series some years ago, and there are still copies of the old Pocket Book (the first four) and Bantam (*Scarab*, *Kennel*, *Dragon*, *Kidnap* cases) paperbacks in the secondhand shops now and then, but Fawcett looks as though it may be the first company to reprint the lot. I'm sure you're wrong about Philo Vance being the only fictional detective in a series of novels to be written of under an alias. In fact, doesn't the first Ellery Queen novel, *The Roman Hat Mystery*, admit that 'Ellery Queen' is an alias—and for a detective newly married and retired at that? My copy of the book is half a continent away, so I can't confirm this memory.

"Incidentally, how about an upcoming discussion of *The Great*



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No. 12, Spring 1969: *The Woman with the Velvet Collar*, Gaston Leroux; *The Reaper's Image*, Stephen King; *Sirrush* (verse), L. Sprague de Camp; *Sword for a Sinner*, Edward D. Hoch; *Tiger*, Bassett Morgan; *The City of the Blind*, Murray Leinster.

No. 13, Summer 1969: *The Gray Killer*, Everil Worrell; *The Scar*, J. Ramsey Campbell; *Where There's Smoke*, Donna Gould Welk; *Ancient Fires*, Seabury Quinn; *The Cases of Jules de Grandin* (article: part one), Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Hansom Cab*, Ken Porter; *The Veil of Tanit*, Eugene de Rezske.

No. 14, Winter 1969: *The Dogs of Doctor Dwann*, Edmond Hamilton; *The Parasite*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Outsider*, H. P. Lovecraft; *The Crawler* (verse), Robert W. Lowndes; *The White Domino*, Urann Thayer; *The Case of the Doctor Who Had No Business* (article), Richard Lupoff; *The Feline Phantom*, Gilbert Draper; *The Consuming Flame*, Paul Ernst.

No. 15, Spring 1970: *Horror Insured*, Paul Ernst; *By Hands of the Dead*, Francis Flagg; *The Monkey's Paw*, W. W. Jacobs; *Cry, Baby, Cry*, Harry Sleasr; *The Man Who Cast No Shadow*, Seabury Quinn.

Merlini in your series on detective fiction? He never achieved the popularity of a Philo Vance, but deserves more recognition than he's received. There are four novels, all by Clayton Rawson: *Death in a Top Hat*, *Footprints in the Ceiling* (the best), *No Coffin for the Corpse*, and *The Headless Lady*; most, I think, in print from Collier pbs. If you haven't encountered him, you might enjoy him, unless you dislike John Dickson Carr, whom he rather resembles."

I'll have to let Mr. Lupoff handle the argument about dates in Burroughs, as I read the early Tarzan novels many years ago, did not keep them, and don't expect to re-read them in the visible future. I enjoyed them all, but once seems to be enough.

I was in error about the number of Philo Vance novels, not hearing about the posthumous *Winter Murder Case* until after it was too late to make any changes in the article. You may be right about Ellery Queen; I'd forgotten.

What I'm doing with the present series is to write commentaries on the detective characters in mystery fiction which particularly gripped me during the thirties, when I was an eager fantasy and science fiction fan in the first stage of enthusiasm. This has required much re-reading, as well as catching up on new titles appearing within the last few years or so (or new editions of older ones I'd missed). Ellery Queen and Perry Mason won't appear in this series; I read them back then, but they didn't really grip me so that, in later years, I found myself re-reading them (or catching up) long before there was any thought of my writing editorials about them. Not that I refuse to read either an Ellery Queen or Perry Mason tale, or could not enjoy it; it's just that I'd much prefer to read or re-read one of the ones I discuss in my series. There *will* be one exception: Nero


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Wolfe. I did not get on to Wolfe until the 50s, but I've re-read every Wolfe story I could lay my hands on several times, so he certainly qualifies. And perhaps Fu Manchu can be considered an exception, too: First of all, these are mystery and suspense, rather than detective stories; second, it's Fu Manchu, not Nayland Smith, who carries the series; third, while I've re-read the original three stories several times, most of the other ten are a first reading—or a first complete reading.

If I have the strength for new research after the present series has finished, well, perhaps I'll tackle the Great Merlini after all.

The Gracie Allen Murder Case was reprinted in soft cover, too; that is where I encountered it. However, be warned: In these earlier soft cover reprints, you are likely to find abridged editions, as was the instance with *The Scarab Murder Case*. I echo your fervent hope that Fawcett Gold Medal Books will give us the complete dozen titles. RAWL



THE EDITOR'S PAGE

(Continued from Page 10)

first part of this essay. A few, like *The Last Seance*, are genuine weird tales.

There are fifteen "independent" novels, although some minor characters appear in more than one. Colonel Race plays an important part in *The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924) and *Remembered Death* (1945); Lady Eileen Caterham, "Bundle", appears in *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925) and *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929). Superintendent Battle appears in *Easy To Kill* (1939) and *Towards Zero* (1944), as well as in several Poirot tales, and the indefatigable Mrs. Ariadne Olive appears without Poirot for the first time in *The Pale Horse*, (1961).

The most famous of the independent novels is, of course, *And Then There Were None* (also sold in the USA as *Ten Little Indians*), which owes something of a debt to *Beau Geste*, and another very fine one is *Crooked House* (one of the author's favorites), which owes something of a debt to Barnaby Rudge, who was later revealed as the pen-name

of a pen-name, Ellery Queen. *Death Comes as The End* is rightly regarded as a *tour de force*, with its setting in ancient Egypt, about 2000 B.C. In her Author's Note, Mrs. Christie states that "...the inspiration of both characters and plot was derived from two or three Egyptian letters of the XIth Dynasty, found during the 1920-21 season by the Egyptian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in a rock tomb opposite Luxor..." They did not have police or detectives in those days, but what the author does is set up a situation on an isolated estate wherein someone must become a successful detective—or else! *They Came to Baghdad* (1951) was inspired by one of the author's own expeditions with her husband; and here is one instance where if you try to detect the author repeating herself, you may fall right into her trap; and she'll have you looking where she wants you to look instead of where you ought to. *Towards Zero* is particularly ingenious and rather chilling. My own

favorite of the lot, to me the most moving of them all, is *Ordeal by Innocence*. Arthur Calgary, a geophysicist who is about to leave England for an Antarctic expedition, picks up a young man who is hitchhiking. Calgary chats with him, lets him off where he wants to go, and continues his own affairs. He gets out of his car to go into a shop for cigarettes and is knocked down by lorry. The resulting concussion temporarily wipes out his memory of recent events; and in any rate he is leaving England and has no time for the papers. When he returns a couple of years later, he finds out that the young man he picked up has been convicted of murder and has died in prison. The young man claimed he had an alibi for the time of the murder; he was riding with a stranger—and Calgary's recollection of the events before his leaving England returns. He himself was the stranger. He cannot save Jack Argyle, but he can tell the truth and clear his name. He goes to the Argyle estate with his story, expecting that they'll be grateful to learn that young Jack was not a murderer.

And not until he's told them the truth does he begin to realize what he's done to them.

This is one of the richest of the Christie novels for insight into human motivations and responses. It is equal in suspense to an earlier Poirot tale, *Murder in Retrospect*, where Poirot is called to solve (confirm or overthrow the official solution) a murder that had taken place sixteen years earlier and it surpasses that novel in other respects. I couldn't care less whether the reader does or does not guess the solution; it's a fine story and a solid refutation to the conventional limits that are placed upon character searching in the detective story.

To the best of my knowledge, all of the independent novels listed above are currently available in soft covers, except

for *The Seven Dials Mystery*—and there's a sporting chance that it, too, will have been reprinted by the time you read this. Since I wrote the first part of this commentary, half a dozen Christie novels unavailable at the time have been restored; so there's a chance that the few still not to be found will re-appear. Meanwhile, a new Poirot tale has been published, and may be available in soft covers by the end of 1970.

The range that Agatha Christie has managed to cover in the puzzle type mystery story is astonishing; you can find nearly every sort written there, from the lightest of comedies and spoofs to the depths of tragedy. There is no single formula. The one you pick up may be fun and adventure or a psychological chiller. The victim may be detestable or a person whose untimely slaughter may outrage you. The culprit may arouse your sympathy or your loathing. Nor again can you be sure that any of these elements will be at a definite polarity. I doubt that many readers will feel much sympathy for the culprit in *The Endless Night*, but it is hard not to feel sorry for the criminal in *Ordeal By Innocence*; and the guilty party in *Murder After Hours* may arouse your sympathy just as this person is sympathised with by the other characters, who are aware of the truth and try to steer Poirot away from it. Again, had you been in Poirot's position, might you not have suggested an alternate solution to *Murder in the Calais Coach*, as he did?

Mr. Ramsey notes Mrs. Christie "looks back upon the first half century of her career with fondness and affection for her readers, although she admits to being a little awed at the idea that she must produce a Christie for Christmas each year lest the earth veer off its course. 'A sausage machine, a perfect sausage machine', she calls herself."

Ah—but such enduring and magnificent sausage! RAWL

Inquisitions

(continued from page 68)

the entire late-19th century era in Holmes's England, centering around *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

The Anamoly of the Empty Man introduces Dr. Verner, who may be a relative of Holmes, as well as a bizarre case which touches on both the weird and science fiction.

The most famous of appreciation pastiches are those by August Derleth, who created Solar Pons in order to continue Dr. Watson's interrupted series. Mack Reynolds suggested distinctly science fiction themes for Solar Pons, and the first of the two might have resulted in a special science fiction series of Pons cases had not market conditions in science fiction magazines intervened and held up further projected stories so long that both authors lost interest.

The Return is the least appropriate candidate for a collection of this nature—and yet I agree that it belongs. A post-atomic armageddon story (they

were legion in the late '40s and early '50s), it relates how a colony of survivors came to regard Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson as not only real but also god-like persons, who will return some day to save the remnant of the faithful.

So you see none of these tales are the sort of pastiche wherein an author writes up cases to which Dr. Watson refers in the canon but never gets around to narrating. (This is what John Dickson Carr and Adrian Conan Doyle did in *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes*, with various degrees of success—but never sinking below interest.) And again, none of them are caricatures like Stephen Leacock's *Maddened by Mystery or The Defective Detective*. If you do not already have too many of these stories in other collections, and the contents sound interesting to you, then this is a well-done book, offset; and Tom Walker's cover illustration is entirely delightful. RAWL

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Reader's Preference Page

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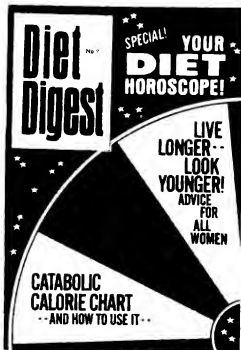
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